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ENGLISH LYRICAL POETRY

ENGLISH LYRICAL POETRY

FROM ITS ORIGINS TO THE
PRESENT TIME

By

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TO
HENRY A. BEERS

PREFACE

There is at present no history of English Lyrical Poetry; it is with the idea of providing one that this volume is published. While it offers a survey of the whole field, it does not include every English writer of lyrics; especially in the last three chapters have the exigencies of limited space compelled the omission of several important authors. It has been necessary to limit further the scope of this volume by reducing to a minimum, or neglecting entirely, all biographical details. With Burns, Moore, Blunt, Stevenson, and Davidson as chief exceptions, Irish and Scottish writers of lyrics have not been considered.

This book represents, in part only, a series of sixty lectures delivered annually since 1899 to members of the Senior Class at Yale College. The writer trusts that it may not only prove of interest to lovers of poetry, but that it may be of use in college courses.

To thank my pupils and friends for much valuable suggestion and criticism is an exceedingly pleasant obligation. I am especially indebted to my colleagues, Professors W. L. Cross, F. M. Warren, F. B. Luquiens, H. N. MacCracken; and to C. F. Tucker-Brooke who has aided me, most opportunely, in the thankless task of reading final proof sheets and in preparing the index. To Professor Henry A. Beers, who proposed this work and who has assisted me in countless ways, I wish to express my heartiest appreciation and gratitude.

E. B. R.

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ENGLISH LYRICAL POETRY

CHAPTER ONE

I

THE LYRIC DEFINED

In Milton's Utopian scheme of education expounded in his letter to Hartlib, it is provided that pupils be taught "that sublime art which in Aristotle's poetics, in Horace, and the Italian commentaries of Castelvetro, Tasso, Mazzoni, and others, teaches what the laws are of a true epic poem, what of a dramatic, what of a lyric." It will be remembered that these students, not yet arrived at manhood, were no common spirits; in addition to Greek, Latin, and Italian, they had mastered the Hebrew tongue "whereto it would be no impossibility to add the Chaldee and the Syrian dialect"; yet even such disciplined minds would find it impossible to learn from these critics and commentators the "laws of a true lyric." At the very beginning of our study, when we must establish at least a working definition, it is natural to turn to the father of literary criticism. We find that Aristotle does not concern himself with this form of poetry, for with the exception of three slight references to the writing of dithyrambs and nomes (hymns and chants sung to musical accompaniment in the worship of Bacchus and Apollo) he leaves the whole subject out of consideration:

"Nor Aristotle, with all his lore,
Ne'er told of the properties of thy kind."¹

¹ *Poetics*, I, ii, xiii; II, vi. "Aristotle passes over the whole of lyric poetry with the most scanty notice, partly, perhaps, because it was little composed in his day, but still more because its marked personal bearing restricted the universal element which he considered necessary to true poetry." E. S. Bouchier, *Aristotle's Poetics*, Oxford, 1908, p. 1, note. S. H. Butcher, *Harvard Lectures on Greek Subjects*, Boston, 1904, p. 198, remarks that Aristotle "passed over with deliberate neglect (for

One thing at least we may gather from Aristotle and the critics who followed him: poetry is to be considered under the threefold classification of the epic, the drama, and the song (whether it be the voice of a lone singer or of a chorus) and song is designated by the term "lyric."¹ Modern criticism has accepted this classification, for, as Arnold observed, the tact of the Greeks in matters of this kind was infallible and their categories of epic, dramatic, and lyric have a natural propriety. Considering these three forms of poetry, we find that the nature of the epic and of the drama is essentially unchanged since Aristotle's day and it is a simple matter to distinguish them as types in a few phrases. The lyric has greatly enlarged its scope so that we can not define it concisely and at the same time accurately. In the classification of literary types, hard and fast lines rarely can be drawn, for the different *genres* tend to approach and join each other. Not only is the lyric spirit manifest in both epic and drama—in Milton's "Hail, holy Light," in Juliet's "Wilt thou be gone? it is not yet near day:"—but something of the epic and of the drama may enter into the lyric; we have "narrative"

such it would seem to be) the great lyrical poetry of Greece—Simonides, Pindar, Sappho, Alcæus, to none of whom does he make even faint allusion. . . . Was it, perhaps, that lyrical poetry interested him only as a rudimentary art—uttering itself in the form of improvised chants and dithyrambic hymns—which marked a stage in the development of the drama? . . . May it not also be that in the personal outbursts of lyrical song, in the self-abandonment, the rush of feeling of Sappho or Alcæus, he missed the characteristic Hellenic self-restraint?"

¹ The Greek term for lyric poetry was μέλος or μελική ποίησις. "Les Grecs déservaient le nom de poésie lyrique à la chanson d'une part, et de l'autre à la grande poésie monodique et chorale, c'est à dire, à des formes de poésie plus complètement et plus richement musicale. L'Élégie et l'Iambe étaient d'une structure trop simple pour admettre une mélodie variée." A. and M. Croiset, *Histoire de la littérature grecque*, Paris, 1898, t. II, p. 43; see also "Melos" in Pauly's *Real-Encyclopädie der Class. Alter.*; E. Nageotte, *Histoire de la poésie lyrique grecque*, Paris, 1888.

lyrics and what Browning has called "dramatic" lyrics. Distinctions are still more confused because the metrical differences that once separated these three kinds of poetry—in Greek literature, for example—have largely disappeared, and we frequently use the same verse form for both narrative and lyric poetry. Philip Ayres, a mediocre poet and translator, and one of the first to entitle his poems lyrics, thought it necessary to defend his use of the iambic pentameter. "I have herein followed the modern Italian, Spanish, and French poets, who always call Lyrics all such Sonnets, and other small poems, which are proper to be set to music, without restraining themselves to any particular length of verse. And our grand Master of Lyrics, even Horace himself, has sometimes inserted the Heroic amongst his."¹ To-day the lyric poet may employ any metre, and in the *Princess* Tennyson uses the same line for the narrative and the song:

"Now while I sang, and maiden-like as far
As I could ape their treble, did I sing:

'Why lingereth she to clothe her heart with love,
Delaying as the tender ash delays
To clothe herself, when all the woods are green?'"

It is then no easy matter to arrive at an adequate description of the lyric; still we must attempt one, and for its first clause we follow the ancient critics in the simple statement that a lyric is a song. Before we add to this, it is important to consider for a moment the fascinating subject of song's antiquity.

As we become more civilized, we become more desirous of discovering the beginnings of our civilization. The man of science, the historian, and the poet have been attracted by this subject, and aided by the researches of ethnology and psychology, the philosopher and the student of literature

¹ *Lyric Poems*, London, 1687.

have discussed vigorously the question of the earliest manifestation of poetry.¹ On such a theme there must be theory and counter-theory, yet there is a growing disposition to accept the statement that the instinct of rhythm, which is at the basis of all poetry, is as closely bound up with man's intelligence as is his perception of light and darkness. Because our own sense of rhythm has become so highly developed, we do not consider it a primitive instinct. Apart from the conclusions of ethnology, in themselves a sufficient proof, there are many reasons for regarding it as old as the mind of man. All passions—love, anger, grief—of themselves seek rhythmic utterance, and whatever our conception of primitive man, we admit that he was governed by the elemental feelings. From another viewpoint, Bücher has clearly proved that rhythm is bound up with all toil and play, which is merely another way of stating that a sense of rhythm is as old as the human race.²

The poetry which was the natural product of this rhythmic feeling was largely communal—a song or chant coming from the dancing, toiling, fighting throng or clan. With our intense individualism, the result of centuries of development, we are prone to reconstruct the antique world after the likeness of our own. Because with us poetry has become the art of a chosen few, we think of the primitive poet in terms of Gray's *Bard*; we picture him seated on some lofty rock, singing to the awed listeners below:

“With haggard eyes the poet stood;
(Loose his beard and hoary hair
Streamed, like a meteor, to the troubled air)
And with a master's hand and prophet's fire,
Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre,”

¹ This whole matter has been adequately treated by Professor F. B. Gummere in *The Beginnings of Poetry*, N. Y., 1901. The footnotes of this volume furnish an excellent bibliography of the entire subject.

² K. W. Bücher, *Arbeit und Rhythmus*, Leipzig, 1896.

but so far as the beginnings of poetry are concerned, modern critics have allowed this singer

“Deep in the roaring tide to plunge to endless night.”

The first poets were but members of the singing, dancing throng, emerging for a moment to lead or improvise, then sinking back into the clan.¹ Aristotle, remarks Professor Gummere, is quite in agreement with the conclusions of psychology and sociology when he derives tragedy and comedy from the clan song. Thus the lyric, the chorus, is the oldest of all poetic forms; as old as self-consciousness, it lies at the very heart of the race and this consideration lends to our study a deeper interest. Our delight in the music of an orchestra or in the colors of stained glass is not lessened when we reflect that primitive man knew nothing of this, yet when we hear or read a song, expressing simply some of the great emotions of life, there comes a new significance as we catch in it the echo of a song old as humanity.² A man may wonder at the stars without a thought of the innumerable years through which they have shone, but if for one brief moment such an idea has never entered his mind, he has never wholly seen them.

Returning now to our definition, we have stated that to the Greeks a lyric was a song. We must carefully avoid

¹ H. M. Posnett, *Comparative Literature*, London, 1886, chap. ii, Early Choral Song. Cf. Gummere, *op. cit.*, p. 92. “As the savage laureate slips from the singing, dancing crowd, which turns audience for the nonce, and gives his short improvisation, only to yield to the refrain of the chorus, so the actual habit of individual composition and performance has sprung from the choral composition and performance.” See also Posnett, pp. 152-4 for a destructive criticism of Hugo’s theory of the origin of the lyric set forth in the preface to *Cromwell*.

² “Thus, looking on choral songs of war or peace as the primary sources from which literature has everywhere developed, we may accept the vulgar canon that all literature begins in song; but it is song widely differing in nature and in impersonal authorship from any to which modern art is accustomed.” Posnett, p. 127.

giving to that word its modern, restricted meaning, for with us a song generally implies a short poem, limited to a small number of simple metres and depending for its effectiveness largely, sometimes entirely, upon the value of its musical accompaniment. With the Greeks, song was an all-embracing term; it included the crooning of the nurse to the child, the half sung chant of the mower or sailor (forms of the lyric which did not enter into literature), the formal ode sung by the poet, and the great chorals, highly wrought in rhythm and diction, sung by the dancing chorus. The elegy was not considered a lyric, though modern historians of Greek literature class it as such. It is out of our province to characterize further the Greek lyric; its extraordinary richness both of form and content must always be borne in mind. No two odes of Pindar are precisely alike in their construction; in general, the Greek lyric poets disdained to repeat the measures of their contemporaries and even the ones they themselves had employed.¹ We must therefore modify materially our conception of a song and in the study of the English lyric we include elegies, epithalamia, and odes, forms which we rarely associate with music.

The modern song differs from the Greek lyric in its simpler construction and in its greater dependence upon music. When our music is married to immortal verse, it becomes the better half. It is true that the most gifted composers seek to reflect and interpret the mood of a poem yet we are prone to regard the musician's rather than the writer's inspiration as the more important element in a song. Too often the musician is unwilling to subordinate himself and in many a song the words are to be considered merely as a starting point and we may neglect them entirely. In all Greek lyrics, even in the choral odes, music was but th

¹ A. Croiset, *La Poésie de Pindare et les lois du lyrisme grec*, Paris 1880, p. 59.

handmaid of verse, for it was the poet himself who composed the accompaniment. Euripides was censured because Iophon, son of Sophocles, had assisted him in the musical setting for some of his dramas.¹

The very nature of Greek music made verse all important. The flute and the cithera, the poet's instrument, furnished a monotonous, colorless background for the words, and in the song, it was the poet rather than the composer who charmed.² The odes of Pindar, the lyrics of Sappho and Alcæus produced their effect upon Roman literature without their musical accompaniment, and we may appreciate the Greek lyric in utter ignorance of Greek music precisely as we enjoy reading the *Irish Melodies*, despite Moore's protest that they are of small value without their musical setting.

“When, round the bowl of vanished years
We talk, with joyous seeming,—
With smiles that might as well be tears,
So faint, so sad their beaming;
While memory brings us back again
Each early tie that twined us,”—

Who remembers that these lines were set to the lively air of “The Girl I Left behind Me”?

We commenced our definition with the statement that the lyric is a song; to this we now add, “or any poem written in a form or style considered lyrical by the Greeks.” Thus Gray's *Progress of Poesy* is a lyric, not because of its song quality, but because it imitates a Greek lyric form.

We have dwelt thus far with the Greek conception of a lyric because we have inherited it; but modern feeling seeks in verse new methods of expression, and we must accord-

¹ Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Arts*, London, 1902, p. 140.

² Croiset, *Pindare*, pp. 73 ff.

ingly enlarge our definition. Even in Greece, music, once the inseparable companion of the lyric, became divorced from it. The musician constantly strove for freer utterance only when music existed for its own sake and not as the setting for a poem could it develop as an art. Pratinas, the rival of Aeschylus in the satiric drama, found it necessary to chide the flutes because they were no longer content to be subservient to the verse: "The flute must follow; it is but a servant." On the other hand, the poet found that music was not necessary for the lyric since the melody of his words could surpass the sound of the flute or cithera. Thus the formal musical element was no longer the distinguishing mark of the lyric, though it never forgot nor can forget its origin in song. The undergraduate may sing *Integer vito scelerisque purus*; it is doubtful whether Horace did.

Though the lyric became divorced from music, its inner nature remained unchanged. It was not in the epic or in the drama but in the lyric that the Greek or Latin poet sang of his own thoughts and emotions, for the lyric was personal, the other forms impersonal. The epic and dramatic writers disappeared behind their heroes, but even in the greater lyrics, the triumphal odes, it is Pindar himself who addresses the victor, and the chorus is but his echo.¹ In an even more marked degree, subjectivity is a determining characteristic, though not the only one, of the modern lyric "Lyric poetry is the expression by the poet of his own feelings," is Ruskin's brief statement, while the historian of Greek literature, after remarking that the term lyric has changed its meaning since classic times, continues: "Pure emotion, unfettered imagination, thought freed from the care of action or of drawing conclusions, this is the real substance of the lyric."² Brunetière, who emphasizes the subjective element, defines lyric poetry as the expression of the

¹ Croiset, *Pindare*, pp. 99-102.

² Croiset, *Histoire de la littérature grecque*, t. II, p. 201.

poet's personal feelings in rhythms corresponding to his emotions.¹ So important does he consider the revelation of the writer's personality, that he would include Rabelais in a study of French lyrical poetry because he was one of the first writers to break with the impersonal manner of the Middle Ages.

A little reflection will show that the subjective element alone does not make a poem a lyric, and that we must draw a clear distinction between lyrical feeling and lyrical form. *Samson Agonistes* is profoundly subjective; few of Wordsworth's poems reveal his personality more plainly than does *Tintern Abbey*, yet these are not lyrics. Palgrave made a necessary distinction when he pointed out that to call a poem lyrical implies essentially that it turn on some single thought, feeling, or situation; in other words, the modern lyric must be a short, musical expression of subjective feeling. The sonnet—frequently set to music in Italy of the Renaissance and Elizabethan England—generally fulfills these conditions; even when a sonnet is descriptive or impersonal it often may be considered a lyric because of its music.

This musical element of the modern lyric is to be found in the melody of rhyme. Certainly the unrhymed lyric, Collins's *Ode to Evening* is a good instance, may possess a rare and subtle music, yet speaking broadly, rhyme renders emphatic the music of verse. Turning to the other part of our statement, that the lyric is a short expression of subjective feeling, it will be found that poems of considerable length are rarely lyrical throughout; they may have lyrical moments, but they tend to become didactic, descriptive, or narrative. As a critic has well said, "The lyric is not only marked by the coloring of human passion, but by beauty and rapidity of movement," and this arises from its very nature.

¹ F. Brunetière, *L'Évolution de la poésie lyrique en France au dix-neuvième siècle*, Paris, 1894, t. I, p. 154.

Let us take the testimony of a poet whose genius was lyrical. In an interesting lecture entitled *The Poetic Theory*, Poe contends that there is no such thing as a long poem. He uses his critical terms loosely and evidently means by poetry, lyric verse; his remarks, accordingly, are most pertinent. A poem, he states, deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites by elevating the soul; but through psychical necessity, that degree of excitement which is necessary to constitute a true poem cannot be sustained throughout in a composition of any length. This statement is too dogmatic, yet underlying it is a sound principle.

We may now review our completed definition. All songs; all poems following classic lyric forms; all short poems expressing the writer's moods and feelings in a rhythm that suggests music, are to be considered lyrics. This threefold statement is not free from ambiguity and does not remove all the difficulties that arise in determining whether or not a given poem is to be considered a lyric. For centuries the ballads were sung, yet as a class they are not songs but narrative poems, little epics.

" The king sits in Dumferling toune,
 Drinking the blude-red wine,
 ' O whar will I get guid sailor,
 To sail this schip of mine? "

is not a lyric; on the other hand, the more modern ballad of *Fair Helen* is of the very essence of lyric verse:

" I wish I were where Helen lies;
 Night and day on me she cries;
 O that I were where Helen lies
 On fair Kirconnell lea!"

Despite such an exception, we must distinguish with Ritson between "songs of sentiment, expression or even descrip-

tion" which are lyrics, and "mere narrative compositions, which we now denominate ballads."¹ Again, coming to the third part of our definition, it is often a question whether the subjective element in a poem predominates sufficiently over the descriptive or didactic element to clearly establish it a lyric. Palgrave includes in his *Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics* Milton's *Penseroso* and *L'Allegro*, yet does not the descriptive element in them outweigh the purely lyrical, despite the fact that they have a song quality—Handel has given to them a characteristic setting—and that *Il Penseroso* in a measure is a picture of Milton himself? There will always be poems on the border line of the lyric, yet in most cases our definition will determine what poems may properly come within our field of study.

We cannot dwell longer on critical distinctions, important as they may be, for our lyric poetry awaits us. There is, however, an objection sometimes raised against lyric verse which it is well to meet at the very beginning of our study. The lyric poet, we are told, enjoys not an absolute but a relative vision, for he is too fascinated by his own thoughts and feelings to have a deep sympathy with the life about him. Like a bird whose eyes have been put out, he sings because he is blind. The writers of lyrics are a lesser clan, living down the slopes of Parnassus; the epic and dramatic poets are the great masters of verse. In answer to this we may urge that the lyric still has something of the epic (witness the Miltonic sweep of Meredith's sonnet, *Lucifer in Starlight*) and of the drama, for it may possess a certain Odysseyan greatness in its portrayal of the wanderings of a soul, and the intensity of a Greek tragedy in its picture of a man struggling alone against his fate. But avoiding comparisons with other forms of verse, we may remind the

¹ J. Ritson, *A Select Collection of English Songs*, 2d edition, London, 1813. A Historical Essay on the Origin and Progress of National Song, p. i, note.

reader that the greatest study in life, and in literature, which is but a manifestation of life, is the study of personality. Even when we talk of race problems and of national movements, our eyes are unconsciously fixed on the man, the leader. The lyric poet, whether he be prince or peasant, reveals himself to us; in Browning's phrase, he is "unashamed of soul," and standing closer to us than any other writer, we know him at once. His expression of emotion is all the more poignant because he makes us his confidants. In the epic there are pages of description or narration before the crisis is reached; in the drama the characters must be introduced and delineated, but in the lyric we find ourselves instantly at the heart of the whole matter, and a single phrase can reveal the poet's world as a sudden flash of lightning illumines the landscape.

There is in the finest lyrics that highest quality of art—a charm that defies analysis. We may put our finger on the great scene that makes a tragedy immortal, but many a lyric lives not for what it says but for what it suggests. There are certain general rules which the epic and the drama observe; the lyric is above any formula that may be devised. Many a dramatist has explained in detail how he wrote his play, from the selection of the theme to the last act; many a lyric poet has testified that he cannot tell how or why he wrote a certain song—it simply "came to him." The lyric spirit is like Blake's spirit of love:

"the gentle wind doth move
Silently, invisibly."

To sing with the infinite harmonies of rhythm and the melodies of rhyme; to move by dim suggestion or to appeal with overpowering passion directly to the feelings; to present thoughts suffused with emotion or ideas that concern the reason chiefly; to summon before the reader's mind by the

“magic incantation of a verse” exquisite colors and forms; to touch the memory and stir the imagination—this is but a faint description of the art of the lyric poet.

As we began this discussion of the lyric by pointing out that it is the oldest of poetic forms, we may end it with the assertion that it is the most enduring. The verse epic, supplanted by the novel, no longer exists; the poetic drama, at least in English-speaking countries, has but little vitality, for it is written under the shadow of the Elizabethans and gives us not life but the faint echo of a distant age. The lyric springs from life itself and so long as man thinks and feels, it can never disappear.

II

THE OLD ENGLISH LYRIC

We have stated that the lyric is the oldest of all poetic forms and accordingly we must look for it in the very beginnings of our literature. The Roman historian, noting the traits of our Germanic forefathers, did not fail to mention their love of song. Whether or not Tacitus idealized the Germans to shame his own countrymen, there is no reason to suspect that he departed from strict accuracy when he speaks of their songs in praise of their divinities, or of what he calls “the well known songs” sung to inflame the warriors’ courage as they rush into battle.¹ If their religious songs were chiefly narrative poems relating the adventures and exploits of their gods, certainly we may assume that these battle hymns were more than a recital of old heroic deeds, and that they were essentially lyrical, for the chant of a tribe may be as true a lyric as the measured strophes of a Greek chorus. There were no scribes to take down these

¹ *Germania*, II-III.

poems; we have only the mention of Tacitus to recall the Germanic lays of Arminius,¹ only a brief reference in the sixth century history of the Goths by Jordanes to remind us of the funeral songs composed for the death of Attila. Such passages, tantalizing in the extreme, are yet sufficient proof that our race, before conquering Britain, had a well-developed lyric tradition. If Tacitus writes of the battle choruses, the Northern sagas show us that bards and minstrels were familiar figures, and that kings themselves, in their last moments, sang defiance to their enemies. In the *Old Lay of Atli* (Attila), when Gunnar, king of the Goths, is taken prisoner and cast alive into a pit filled with deadly serpents, he meets his end like a hero. "But Gunnar, alone there, in his wrath smote the harp with his hands; the strings rang out."²

It is not surprising that our oldest English poem—so scholars have entitled it—should deal with a *scop* or singer. The poem of *Widsith*, or the *Far-Wanderer*, purports to be an account by a much travelled bard of the many peoples he has visited and of the rewards he has received from their chieftains and kings. A single glance at his bare catalogue of princes and nations is sufficient to show that the wanderings of this Germanic Odysseus belong to the realms of fiction; originally the poem may have recounted the travels of a famous singer, but in its present form, with its numerous interpolations, it presents to us but a purely mythical personage. Critics believe that certain parts of *Widsith* were written before the Angles and Saxons had left their old home, and this narrative poem offers accordingly one more proof that our love of song is an ancient heritage. *Widsith* tells us that he was received by the most famous kings; they delighted in him and gave him presents—rings of gold—

¹ *Annales*, II, 88.

² F. B. Gummere, *Germanic Origins*, N. Y., 1892, pp. 231-232.

when he "with clear voice raised the song, loud to the harp."¹

The oldest English lyric, and the only poem in Old English written in strophic form with a refrain, is *Deor's Lament*. Like Widsith, Deor is a *scop*, but he has had nothing of Widsith's good fortune, for he has been superseded in his lord's favor by a rival singer—a situation which finds a parallel in Shakespeare's sonnets. Deor laments his sad fate and to comfort himself he recalls the woes that others have suffered and overcome. The song has but forty-two lines; the concluding strophe, in the Old English, is as follows:

"Þæt ic bi me sylfum secgan wille,
 þæt ic hwile wæs Heodeninga scop,
 dryhtne dyre: me wæs Deor noma.
 Ahte ic fela wintra folgað tilne,
 holdne hlaford, op þæt Heorrenda nu,
 leoðcræftig monn londryht gepah,
 þæt me eorla hleo ær gesealde.
 þæs ofereode, pisses swa mæg!"²

In Professor Gummere's translation this strophe runs:

"To say of myself the story now,
 I was singer erewhile to sons-of-Heoden,
 dear to my master, Deor was my name.
 Long were the winters my lord was kind;
 I was happy with clansmen; till Heorrenda now
 by grace of his lays has gained the land
 which the haven-of-heroes erewhile gave me.
 That he surmounted: so this may I!"³

¹ For the text of *Widsith* and the old English lyrics hereafter mentioned, see R. P. Wülcker-C. W. M. Grein, *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Poesie*, Kassel, 1883, Bd. I. For translations, see Cook and Tinker, *Select Translations from Old English Poetry*, Boston, 1902. See also the discussion of *Widsith* in F. B. Gummere's *The Oldest English Epic*, N. Y., 1909, p. 188 ff.

² Wülcker-Grein, Bd. I, p. 280.

³ See Professor Gummere's interesting comments on this poem, *The Oldest English Epic*, pp. 178 ff.

and in Professor Lewis's free adaptation:

"I, Deor of the Heodenings, was dear to my good lord,
And did long minstrel service, nor missed my due reward;
Till now this mightier minstrel thrusts my lord and me apart,
And wins my lands and living with the wiles of his high art.
He has his day; he overcame; but peace! break not, my heart!"¹

It is significant that our first lyric should be the song of a *scop*; it is equally significant that this lyric is a lament. The tragedy of life was ever present in the thoughts of our forefathers. They had been reared amid the forests and marshes that were so repellent to the mind of Tacitus: "Quis . . . Germaniam peteret, informem terris, asperam cælo, tristem cultu aspectuque, nisi si patria sit?"² The land that bred them was cold and gloomy, and in their verse we hear the rush of the storm. Desperate fighters, they saw ever the struggle of life. For such men poetry must have not charm but strength, not joy but melancholy; the few poems that approach the lyric form are all elegiac. *The Seafarer*, the finest of the shorter Old English poems, tells of weary hours and hard days

"Mid the terrible rolling of waves, habitations of sorrow.
Benumbed by the cold, oft the comfortless night-watch hath
held me
At the prow of my craft as it tossed about under the cliffs."

Yet the singer is impelled by the wanderlust,

"he has always a longing, a sea-faring passion
For what the Lord God shall bestow, be it honor or death.
No heart for the harp has he, nor for acceptance of treasure,
No pleasure has he in a wife, no delight in the world,
Nor in aught save the roll of the billows; but always a longing,
A yearning uneasiness, hastens him on to the sea."³

¹ Cook and Tinker, p. 60.

² *Germania*, II.

³ Cook and Tinker, pp. 45-46.

In the *Wanderer*, the singer, far from his home and kinsmen, dreams of happier days in the banqueting hall of his lord. He awakens, and the contrast between his old life and his present outcast state is most poignantly drawn:

“ But the friendless man awakes, and he sees the yellow waves,
And the sea-birds dip to the sea, and broaden their wings to the
gale,
And he sees the dreary rime, and the snow commingled with
hail.
O, then, are the wounds of his heart the sorer much for this,
The grief for the loved and lost made new by the dream of old
bliss.”

The poem ends in a lament for the world; a glory has departed from the earth; the horse and rider have been overthrown; the strength of princes has vanished; and Wyrð, or Fate, has brought to destruction the towers and banquet halls.¹

In the *Banished Wife's Complaint* we have the lyrical monologue of a forsaken woman whose husband has crossed the sea, leaving her to be imprisoned in a cave. In her wretchedness she laments her lot, for to be banished from the family or clan was the hardest of all fates. Desdemona cries, “O, banish me, my lord, but kill me not,” but to the Anglo-Saxon, death was preferable to exile.²

Of these four poems, *Deor* is the one pure lyric; the descriptive, narrative, and moralizing passages in the other three bring them on the border line of lyric verse. This is indeed but a small group to represent our earliest songs; undoubtedly they are typical of a large body of lyric poems that have completely disappeared, for Old English poetry is full of allusions to songs and singers. In *Beowulf*, the warriors in the banqueting hall delight in the songs of the *scop*

¹ P. 52.

² P. 64. Cf. *Germanic Origins*, pp. 169 ff.

and down to the Norman conquest harp and song moved and charmed our ancestors. When the Angles and Saxons turned to Christianity, when from "wolves and sea-dogs," as Gildas called them, they became the leaders in education, attracting students from all Europe to Northumbria, they still retained, a legacy from the past, the lyric mood. In the time of Cædmon (d. 680) it was still the custom for the guests at a feast to sing in turn. Because he could not sing, Cædmon felt so disgraced that "he would, as soon as he saw the harp coming anywhere near him, jump up from the table in the midst of the banqueting, leave the place, and make the best of his way home."¹ The fragment of Cædmon's hymn which Bede preserves is the oldest lyric composed in England that can be approximately dated.² Warriors, we are told by Cynewulf, still listened to minstrels who could play loudly upon the harp.³ Asser informs us that Alfred (d. 901) "was an attentive listener to Saxon poems which he often heard recited and being apt at learning, kept them in his memory." As a boy, he learned by heart a whole book of Saxon verse which his mother had showed to him, and when king, he saw to it that his sons carefully learned Saxon books, "especially Saxon poems."⁴ Surely some of these were lyrics. We could well have spared many pages of Alfred's translations for a few of these poems which so stirred him. To come within a century of the Conquest, Dunstan (d. 988) was not only an accomplished musician, a skillful player on the harp, but in his youth his enemies asserted that he learned with the greatest zeal "*Gentilitatis vanissima carmina*"—the vainest songs of the heathen.⁵ King Cnut was a poet, and one of

¹ Bede relates this. See Cook and Tinker, p. 180.

² P. 76.

³ A. S. Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, Boston, 1900, ll. 666-670.

⁴ A. S. Cook, *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, Boston, 1906, chap. 22-23, 75-76.

⁵ William Stubbs, *Memorials of St. Dunstan*, London, 1874, p. 11.

his songs was long sung by the people. Only the first stanza remains:

“ Merie sungen the muneches binnen Ely, (monks)
Tha Cnut ching rew ther by.

“ Roweth, cnihtës, noer the land,
And herë we thes muneches sang.”¹

These all too brief indications of the existence of the Old English lyric give us no hints of its literary value; we can build no theories on these stray lines. Our earliest lyrics disappeared, not because they were valueless but because the clergy, who were the scribes, considered the “vain songs of the heathen” unworthy of remembrance; better a line of a sermon or a word of scripture than pages of lyrics of fight and feasting. Bede was called “learned in our songs” yet they found no place in his writings. The religious poetry of this age was narrative and didactic rather than lyrical; the first part of Cynewulf’s *Christ* is based upon a series of antiphons and is accordingly lyrical in its feeling, yet the poem is not lyrical in its form and lies outside our province, though near it.² We have no Old English hymns, yet it is probable that with the Latin songs of the church there existed for the common people some religious or festal songs in the vernacular. At least we know that Bede in his last hours composed a death song in the English tongue:

“ Before the dread journey which needs must be taken
No man is more mindful than meet is and right
To ponder, ere hence he departs, what his spirit
Shall, after the death-day, receive as its portion
Of good or of evil, by mandate of doom.”³

¹ Cf. *The Beginnings of Poetry*, p. 275.

² Cook, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, p. xci.

³ Cook and Tinker, p. 78.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MIDDLE ENGLISH LYRIC

I

Wace tells us that at the battle of Hastings, Taillefer advanced from the Norman ranks against the Saxon lines singing of Roland and the peers :

“ Taillefer, qui mult bien chantout,
Sor un cheual qui tost alout,
Deuant le duc alout chantant
De Karlemaigne e de Rollant
E d'Oliuer e des uassals,
Qui morurent en Renceuals.”

“ Taillefer, who sang exceedingly well,
Upon a swift horse,
Before the Duke went singing
Of Charlemagne and of Roland
And of Oliver and of the vassals
Who died at Roncevaux.”¹

If we accept this picture, the minstrel knight foretold unconsciously the conquest of French song, for with the advent of the Normans there arose in England a new lyric. To understand it, we must first examine the French lyric which transformed Saxon verse by giving it new forms of expression, new thoughts and emotions; for French song, instead of stifling the native lyric impulse, deepened and perfected it.

According to the theory of Gaston Paris, the French lyric had its origins in Poitou and Limousin at the yearly dances

¹ *Maistre Wace's Roman de Rou*, ll. 8035-8040, ed. by H. Andresen, Heilbronn, 1877-9.

conquering army, and Tennyson in his paraphrase has caught the spirit of the forgotten poet who made the lines:

“ We the West-Saxons,
Long as the daylight
Lasted, in companies
Troubled the track of the host that we hated;
Grimly with swords that were sharp from the grindstone,
Fiercely we hack'd at the flyers before us.

* * * * *

Many a carcase they left to be carrion,
Many a livid one, many a sallow-skin—
Left for the white-tail'd eagle to tear it, and
Left for the horny-nibb'd raven to rend it, and
Gave to the garbaging war-hawk to gorge it, and
That gray beast, the wolf of the weald.”

This has the true ring; that Germanic ardor for battle that so impressed Tacitus burns undiminished.

We leave the Old English Period, not empty-handed, but with scanty gleanings. We have found enough to make us understand how old are certain dominant characteristics of modern song. The love of adventure and combat; the delight in nature; the sense of the mystery of the world and of the tragic aspects of life, have come down to us from our forefathers. Unconsciously we sing the same strains that fell from their lips. Even their manner of singing is still with us; for them alliteration gave to verse the same beauty we find in rhyme, and accordingly we still ornament our lyrics in their fashion. The Norman Conquest revolutionized the technique and the content of English song, but in all the changes we still hear echoes of the earlier lyric, notes that seem to come from some forgotten *scop*.

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held at Easter, in the May season.¹ At these festivals, survivals of the old pagan *Floralia*, women were the chief celebrants; they led the dances and the songs whose themes were love, youth, and the joy of life when spring, with its birds and flowers, puts winter to flight. These songs, with their strong pagan element, were a scandal to the early church, and the measures it took to suppress them prove that they were sung far and wide. At the council of Châlons, held in the seventh century, the priests were instructed to prohibit the women from singing profane songs as they gathered at the church porches, and a decree of the following century forbade the priests to copy or spread love songs.² These lyrics, whose popularity the church could not destroy, were sung and probably improvised in the open air, in the meadows. They were called *caroles*, a word that signifies a dance to the accompaniment of song. The participants (in the earliest time, women; later, both men and women) holding each other's hands, danced *en rond* while the leader sang a verse or couplet to which the dancers added a refrain. In the English poem of *Arthour and Merlin*, written about 1300, there are interpolated some charming spring songs, one of which gives us the whole picture:

"Miri time it is in May,
Than wexeth along the day, (Then)
Floures schewen her borioun, (show their buds)
Miri it is in feld & toun,
Foules miri in wode gredeth, (in the wood call)
Damisels carols ledeth."³

The parts of these *caroles* most easily remembered were the refrains; they were recalled and quoted long after the

¹ *Journal des Savants*, November, December, 1891; March, July, 1892.

² Cf. C. Voretzsch, *Einführung in das Studium der altfranzösischen Literatur*, Halle, 1905, pp. 96-7.

³ *Arthour and Merlin*, ed. E. Kölbing, Leipzig, 1890, ll. 1709 ff.

songs to which they belonged had faded from the memory. Several are cited in the romances; a characteristic one is the following, sung at Mainz on May day by two young girls who lead back the folk from the woods where they have been gathering flowers and branches:

“ Tout la gieus sor rive mer,
Compaignon, or dou chanter.
 Dames i ont bauz levez:
 Mout en ai le cuer gai.
Compaignon, or dou chanter
En l'onor de mai.”

“ All below there on the bank of the stream,
Friends, now some singing,
 The women have begun the dances:
 I have a heart full of joy for this.
Friends, now some singing,
*In honor of May.”*¹

Another typical refrain is preserved in *La Cour de Paradis*, where the Virgin in heaven leads a dance, singing an old May song:

“ Let all those who are in love
 Come dance, but not the others.”²

These May festivals, with their songs, were originally celebrated by the common folk; peasants were the dancers and singers, but as an aristocracy arose, it too desired to celebrate these rites, and the songs were thus known by high and low. From these *caroles*, then, asserts Paris, there developed in the South the Provençal lyric, the poetry of the

¹ *Le Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*, ed. G. Servois, *Société des anciens textes français*, Paris, 1893, p. 125. Cf. the article by Paris in the same volume, p. xcix.

² E. Wechssler, *Das Kulturproblem des Minnesangs*, Halle, 1909, p. 446.

troubadours, from which in turn sprang in the North the lyrics of the trouvères. To all this verse is given the general designation of *chanson courtoise*. In the North, again, transformed to *aube*, *pastourelle*, *débat*, *ballade*, these *caroles* lived on in what we shall call *la poésie populaire*, not as the name seems to imply, folk song, but poetry that is far closer to the folk than the *chanson courtoise*.¹ It is a fair question whether Paris has proved his thesis. Though we admit that the *poésie populaire* is derived from these *caroles*, it is difficult to find in them the origin of the *chanson courtoise*. In its technique, in its conception of love this is utterly removed from all folk poesy; its only resemblance to these dance songs is to be found in nature passages. It is quite possible that the *chanson courtoise* is more closely allied to the Latin poetry, secular and religious, of the Middle Ages, but we cannot dwell longer on this question of origins, for we must consider the subject-matter of the *chanson courtoise* and *la poésie populaire*, since both *genres* influenced the English lyric.²

So much has been published on the fascinating subject of troubadour and trouvère poetry that we shall attempt merely to summarize in the briefest fashion its most striking characteristics. Though written for the aristocracy, for the "amans fins et vrais," though composed by kings and princes, it approached the *caroles* (hence it descended from them, argues Paris) in countless allusions to the coming of spring, the budding of flower and leaf, the singing of the birds. Whatever the theme, joy or sorrow, praise or satire, love or religion, the poet should begin:

¹ Cf. L. Clédât, *La Poésie lyrique et satirique en France au moyen âge*, Paris, 1893, pp. 27 ff.

² See the article by J. Bédier, *Revue de Deux Mondes*, 1 Mai, 1896; Voretzsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-196; F. M. Warren, in a paper read before the Yale Romance Club, October, 1910, argues forcibly for the Latin origin of the *chanson courtoise*.

“ Li nouveauz tans et mais et violete
et roussignols me semont de chanter.”

“ The spring, and May, and the violet
And the nightingale impel me to sing.”¹

Such lines soon became purely conventional and bore little or no relation to the poem that followed. After the customary opening stanza on the flowers in the green grass and the red and white blossoms upon the bushes, the most famous *sirvente* of Bertrand de Born changes abruptly to a song of war, filled with an almost savage ardor. As the troubadours sang more often of the sorrows than of the joys of love, the happiness of the spring time is merely a foil for their grief. Bernart de Ventadorn has a graceful poem in which his feelings are atune with the May:

“ Quant l'erba fresqu' e'l fuelha par
e la flors botona el verian,
e'l rossinhols autet e clar
leva sa votz e mou son chan,
ioy ai de luy e ioy ai de la flor
e ioy de me e de midons maior;
daus totas partz suy de ioy claus e sens,
mas sel es ioys que totz autres ioys vens.”²

“ When the fresh grass and leaf appears,
And the flower buds on the branch,
And the nightingale loud and clear
Raises his voice and sings,
I have joy in him and joy in the flower,
Joy in myself, but more in my lady;
On all sides I am surrounded with joy,
But she is joy above all others.”

¹ K. Bartsch, *Chrestomathie de l'ancien français*, Leipzig, 1884, col. 239.

² C. Appel, *Provenzalische Chrestomathie*, Leipzig, 1902, p. 58.

Yet even Bernart must go in the spring time "half dead, weeping while others laugh," and the Châtelain de Couci sings:

"Quant li estez et la dolce saisons
Fait fuelle et flor et les prez renverdir,
Et li dolz chans des menus oisillons
Fait les pluisors de joie sovenir,
Las! chascuns chante, et je plor et sospir."¹

"When the summer and the sweet season
Make leaf and flower and the meadows grow green again
And the sweet song of the little birds
Makes most persons remember their happiness,
Alas! every one sings, and I weep and sigh."

We have stated that apart from these nature pictures, the troubadour lyric has practically nothing that is of the folk. Since the unmarried girl had no share in the social life of the times, these songs were written for the wives of the Provençal nobles, the châtelaines

"whose bright eyes
Reign influence and award the prize."

The love they inspired became a cult and almost a religion. It was not the frank love of a man for a maid, but a strange fascination caused by a single glance from the lady; there is a touch of mysticism in *l' enamorament*, when love is awakened by a subtle power, flowing like some mysterious fluid from the lady's eyes to the poet's heart:

"d'un dolz regart, por voir,
Fist par mes eus dedenz mon cuer cheoir
La grant amor, qui si me fraint et brise."

¹J. Brakelmann, *Les plus anciens chansonniers français*, Paris, 1891, p. 125; cf. p. 101.

“ by a sweet look, truly
 She made through my eyes into my heart fall
 The great love that breaks and crushes me.”¹

So, in Chaucer's *Knights Tale*, the moment Palamon and Arcite see from their prison Emily walking in the garden, they become her devoted slaves. The poet is always the vassal of his lady, and implicit obedience to her as a liege lord is his first duty.

“ A toz les jors de ma vie
 La servirai,
 Et serai en sa baillie
 Tant com vivrai,
 Ne ja de sa seignorie
 Ne partirai;”

“ All the days of my life
 I shall serve her,
 And I shall be in her power
 So long as I shall live,
 Nor ever from her rule
 Shall I depart.”

His life is in her hands:

“ Bele dame, en vos mis ai
 Cuer et cors et vie,
 Ne ja ne m'en partirai
 Nul jor de ma vie.”

“ Fair lady, in your keeping I have placed
 Heart and body and life,
 And I shall never depart,
 Any day of my life.”²

¹ P. 31. Cf. J. Anglade, *Les Troubadours*, Paris, 1908, p. 84.

² Brakelmann, pp. 53, 49.

sings Chrestien de Troies, and no suffering which she may cause him, not even her extreme cruelty, may release him from his allegiance to her and to Love.

The poet's service is a long one, and he tells us that his lady's cruelty often brings him nigh to death, yet if he prove secret, devoted, unswerving, his "painful patience in delays" may be rewarded at last—by a kiss. This is his great hope, for it seals him her lover. Even after this he is still the vassal, the subject of love, singing for one whose very name he must not mention but must address as Belle-Vue, or Plus-que-Reine, or Beau-Miroir, to give these euphuistic titles their modern form.

As this love was almost a religion, it was inevitable that the poets turned from the lady of the castle to the Lady of Heaven, and they sang to her as they would to their Beau-Miroir or their Belle-Joie, in the same metres, in the same phrases, so that at times it is difficult to distinguish their love poetry from their hymns to the Virgin. She was the "fraiche dame gentis," the "douce damoiselle," "la Vierge courtoise et charmante," "la gracieuse dame qui est belle et blonde," and she inspired a love that expressed itself in the conventional language of the *chansons d'amour*. In a word the poet was not the worshipper of the Virgin but her *amant*.¹

In all their poetry the troubadours sought perfection of form. Their art was never concealed; they boasted of it, priding themselves that they knew how to "batir" or "forger une chanson." Thus technique became all important and the poets were more desirous of inventing new rhymes than of showing originality in their thought or sincerity in their emotion. They employed a marvellous variety of metres; eight hundred and seventeen have been classified, ranging from strophes of three to forty-two lines, and certainly no other lyric poetry is more rich in its modes of expression.²

¹ Cf. Anglade, pp. 214 ff; Wechssler, *op. cit.*, chap. xviii.

² Anglade, pp. 10, 52.

It must not be thought that troubadour verse is wholly conventional in its substance and elaborately artificial in its form (though too often that is the case), for there were tragedies in the careers of these singers; life was not always May time and we often hear in their verses the note of sincere and deep emotion. They could write in a simpler manner; the following lines from a song by Gautier d'Espinal have a direct and passionate utterance that we shall meet again in the early English lyric:

“Sire Deus, car la tenoie
Nuete entre mes dous bras,
Sa bouchete baiseroie,
Molt m'est bon, quant que li fas.
Ne rois ne cuens nen est mie
Qui'n eüst tant gent solaz,
De tenir sa compaignie
Jamais ne seroie laz!”¹

“Lord God, would I might hold her
Between my two arms,
I would kiss her little mouth;
It pleases me right well, whatever I do to her.
There was never king nor count
Who might have such gentle pleasure;
Of attending her
Never should I be tired.”

The first troubadour was Guillaume, count of Poitou, duke of Aquitaine, who ruled from 1087 to 1127. He stands among the foremost singers, for he brought the lyric to a high degree of art. Among other metres, he employed a strophe which found its way into the *poésie populaire*; which was brought to England and used by the early lyrists, later by writers of miracle plays; and which finally served the last of the Scottish vernacular poets—Robert Burns himself:

¹ Brakelmann, p. 30.

“ Pus vezem de novelh florir
Pratz, e vergiers reverdezir
Rius e fontanas esclarzir,
Auras e vens,
Ben deu quascus lo joy jauzir
Don es jauzens.”¹

“ When verdant meadows reappear,
And green invades the garden sere,
And river and spring begin to clear,
And zephyrs blow,
The joy that fills our heart with cheer
Must overflow.”²

The granddaughter of Guillaume, Eleanor of Poitou, inherited from him a nature disposed to gallantry and a love for poetry. In 1152 she married Henry II of England, a scholar and connoisseur of literature whose court at London became the center of a brilliant galaxy of French writers. “I work for a king,” said Benoit de Sainte-More, “who knows better than any one how to distinguish and appreciate a fine piece of writing.”³ Eleanor was as great a patron of letters as was her husband. Deeply in love with her, Bernart de Ventadorn, considered by modern critics the finest of all the troubadours, followed her to the English capital where he sang in her honor the lyrics of the South. Some fifty of his songs have been preserved; the larger number of his finest ones are addressed to her.

In France and Italy, in Spain and Portugal, the writings of some four hundred troubadours are known to us (in some cases only by a few lines), and seventy others, whose lyrics

¹ C. A. F. Mahn, *Die Werke der Troubadours*, Berlin, 1846, vol. 1, p. 8.

² J. H. Smith, *The Troubadours at Home*, New York, 1899, vol. II, p. 344.

³ Cf. Gaston Paris, *La poésie du moyen âge, deuxième série*, Paris, 1895, pp. 33 ff.

have completely disappeared, are known by name; yet of this great number, there is not a single troubadour who wrote in English. The reason is not hard to discover; troubadour verse was composed for the nobility and English was the language of the peasant. It was a full century and a half after the conquest that the writer of *Arthour and Merlin* declares:

“Of Freynsch ne Latin nil y tel more,
Ac on Inglish ichil tell therefore: (But) (I will tell)
Right is, that Inglische understand,
That was born in Ingland.”

When Eleanor's son, Richard Cœur de Lion, a poet and patron of poets, composed the verses on his captivity, he did not use a phrase from the language of the land he ruled; thus, though the troubadour lyric was heard in England, it could not affect directly English song. Its indirect influence was great. Petrarch knew and admired the writings of the troubadours, though he was born after their day, and we do not need his praise of them in his *Trionfo d'Amore* to discover that their ideal of love, expressed in the very phrases they used, is to be found in many of the sonnets to Laura. The last of the troubadours, Guiraut Riquier, died in the closing years of the thirteenth century; but in Elizabethan England, through translations and imitations of Petrarch's sonnets, their songs entered into English verse. Through another medium they contributed to the development of the English lyric—through their influence on *la poésie populaire*.

This poetry, we remember, was an outgrowth of the old May songs and accordingly we find in it many allusions to May and to the delights of spring. Though often charming, these little introductions tend to become purely conventional:

" C'est en mai au mois d'este
que florist flor,"

or

" En mai au douz tens nouvel,
que raverdissent prael,
oisoiz un arbroisel
chanter le rosignolet.
saderla don!
tant fet bon
dormir lez le buissonet."¹

" It is in May in the summer month
That the flower blooms."

" In May at the sweet Spring time,
When the meadows grow green again.
I heard beneath a tree
The pretty Nightingale sing.
Saderla don!
So good it is
To sleep beside the little bushes."

Certainly *la poésie populaire* is not folk song, for there is too much conscious art in it, yet it is nearer than the *chanson courtoise* to the folk in its themes, its simpler technique, and in its personages, often shepherds or peasants. Its refrains, recalling the old dance songs, were easily remembered and sung:

" Chibera la chibele, douz amis,
chibera le chibele, soiez jolis." (be loving)

" dorenlot deus or haes, (henceforth hate)
j'amerai."

¹ K. Bartsch, *Altfranzösische Romanzen und Pastourellen*, Leipzig, 1870, pp. 54, 22.

" J'ai ameit et ameraï
 he! dorelot! et s'aimme aincor,
 deus! de jolif cuer mignot."¹ (the sweetheart of fair body)

According to Jeanroy, the oldest French lyric was a song, expressing varied shades of feeling, put in the mouth of a young girl, and originally the *poésie populaire* showed us women passionately devoted and submissive to indifferent and faithless men.² At the end of the twelfth century, this conception of love changed and men were shown to be the suitors; still many of these poems are written from the woman's point of view, and it is a maid we hear singing:

" Belle Aliz matin leva,
 sun cors vesti et para;
 enz un verger s'en entra,
 cink fluerettes i trouva:
 un chapelet fet en a
 de rose fleurie.
 'pur deu, trahez vous en la
 vus ki ne amez mie.' "³

" Fair Alice rose in the morning,
 Clothed and adorned herself;
 She went into a garden
 And found five small flowers there:
 She made of them a chaplet
 Of roses in bloom.
 ' For God's sake, go hence
 You who do not love at all.' "

Though the *chanson courtoise* changed the conception of love in these poems, it by no means introduced its own ideal; the women in the *poésie populaire* are never held as things

¹ Pp. 186, 271, 307.

² A. Jeanroy, *Les Origines de la poésie lyrique en France au moyen âge*, Paris, 1889, pp. 225, 445 ff.

³ Bartsch, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

enskyed and sainted, while the men, extremely human, are not satisfied with ecstatic adoration or with contemplating and analyzing their own feelings.

The *poésie populaire* developed *genres* that are clearly defined: the *pastourelle*, in which a rider, generally the poet himself, wandering in the fields or woods, meets a fair maiden and makes love to her, usually with success; the *débat*, in which the singer maintains an opinion against the arguments of a second person, as in the English ballad of the *Nutbrowne Maide*; the *chanson de toile*, short narrative poems of belle Erembour or belle Isabeau, sung by women at their sewing or weaving; the *aube*, or song of lovers parted at dawn by the cry of the watch or the notes of the lark.¹ More important in its effect on English verse was the dance song, the *chanson de carole*, the *rondet*, the *rondet de carole*; these forms were the most popular ones and entered more widely into the life of the people than the other types we have just mentioned. As late as the seventeenth century, Burton, in his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, tells us that in France nothing was more common than to see in the streets women and girls dance *en rond* or to hear them "make good music of their own voices and dance after it." In these songs, the refrain, oft repeated, is the important element:

" Danses, bele Marion,
ja n'aim je riens se vos non."

and from the refrains developed such dance songs as the *balete*, the *rondel*; for while the troubadours wished to find for every poem a new metre, and only as an exception, duly acknowledged, wrote songs modelled on older pieces, folk song loves to repeat the same phrases and the same measures.

¹ See the interesting remarks of Gaston Paris on the *Aube* in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Journal des Savants*, 1892, p. 163.

These dance songs fairly sing themselves, as this *rondel* by Guillaume d'Amiens:

" C'est la fins, koi que nus die,
j'amerai!
c'est la jus en mi le pre,
c'est la fins, je veul amer,
jus et baus i a levés,
bele amie ai,
c'est la fins, koi que nus die,
j'amerai."¹

" There's an end, whatever any one may say,
I shall love!
It is down there in the midst of the fields,
There's an end of it, that I wish to love.
Games and dances have been started there,
I have a fair friend.
There's an end of it, whatever any one may say,
I shall love."

Long after their origin was forgotten, English poets inherited from the *poésie populaire*, the *ballade*, *rondel*, *rondeau*, and *triolet*.

There is yet another large and interesting group of French songs that inspired the English lyric—the *Noëls*, the oldest form of sacred song in the vernacular tolerated by the church. Latin Christmas songs were well known:

" Dormi, fili, dormi! mater
Cantat unigenito:
Dormi puer, dormi! pater
Nato clamat parvulo.
Millies tibi laudes canimus
Mille, mille, millies."²

¹ Bartsch, *Chrestomathie*, col. 341.

² E. P. Du Ménil, *Poésies populaires latines antérieures au douzième siècle*, Paris, 1843, p. 110 n.

but the *Noëls*, though they have often a Latin refrain, as in

“Cet enfant tout aimable,
In nocte media,
Est né dans une étable,
De castâ Mariâ,”¹

were in French and were sung by the worshippers in the churches as they waited for the midnight mass on Christmas eve. They date from the eleventh century, and in 1194 Lambert, bishop of Arras, speaking of the Christmas fêtes, writes:

“Lumine multiplici noctis solatia præstant
Moreque Gallorum carmina nocte tonant.”²

(They overcome the darkness of night by many lights, and in the fashion of the French, sing songs in the night.)

These *Noëls*, songs of rejoicing not only for Christmas but for the New Year, were extraordinarily popular; indeed the word Noël came to mean “vivat,” “hurrah,” and was shouted in the streets of London when Henry V returned from Agincourt in 1415. There was hardly a parish in France where they were not improvised to meet the demand, and the early French printers furnished *Bibles de Noëls* by the score. Hardly a city with a press failed to bring out its special collection—Paris, Tours, Orléans, Blois, Angers, Nantes, Vannes, Rennes—the list is a long one, and many *Noëls* survive only in manuscripts.

The *Noëls* naturally concern themselves with the annunciation; the birth of Christ; the slumber songs of the Virgin, and the visit of the Shepherds and Magi. It is the literature of high spirits and rejoicing; Adam had destroyed the race:

¹ *Vieux Noëls*, Nantes, 1876, vol. III, p. 2.

² J.-B. Weckerlin, *Chansons populaires du pays de France*, Paris, 1903, vol. I.

“ Adam, premier père,
 Nous mit en danger
 De la pomme chère
 Qui'l voulut manger;”¹

and with him, Eve is held up to scorn that the Virgin, saving the race, may be the more honored. All the carols of the birth of Christ are written from the standpoint of the peasant, in the language of the curious folk who naïvely question the Virgin, as they would a village maiden, on the great event of which they have just heard, taking a shrewd satisfaction that “les bourgeois de la ville” and “les gros marchands” have done nothing, while the shepherds have brought their gifts to the child.

“ L'ung lui a porté son manteau,
 Ung autre a porté son bourdon,
 Et l'autre a doné son costeau,
 Ung autre sa bourse en purdon;
 Et à la mère
 Fesaient grand chère,
 Démenans soulas et deduyct
 Pour ce mignon venu de nuyct.”²

The refrains are a most important part of the *Noëls*. Rarely are they written without them; often the refrain occurs after every couplet, at times after every line, such refrains as:

“ Chantons Nolet, Nolet, Nolet,
 Chantons nolet encore,”³

which certainly hardly needs the music, it so trips along. One old Poitevin *Noël* preserves an interesting chorus:

¹ *Vieux Noëls*, vol. I, p. 25.

² *Noëls de Lucas LeMoigne*, Paris, 1520, in *Vieux Noëls*, I, p. 4.

³ P. 57.

“ Au saint Nau,
Chanteray sans point m’y feindre.
Y n’en daigneray ren craindre,
Car le jour est feriau.
Nau, nau, nau,
Car le jour est feriau.”¹

Le jour feriau inspired many lyrics in which the religious signification of the day is quite forgotten in the feasting and rejoicing; and in the thirteenth century the jongleurs personified Noël, treating him as a sort of lord of misrule:

“ Le Sire Noël
Nous envoie à ses amis.”

The *Noëls* have sometimes been lightly spoken of as lacking art, as being monotonous, but they have found an eloquent admirer in Nodier, who delighted in their grace and simplicity of expression, and indeed many of them possess a charm, a directness of utterance that the lyrics of higher art rarely reach.² The following thirteenth century *Noël*, with its single line for the leader of the song and its tenderly written chorus, possesses a beauty that is enhanced by the haunting melody that accompanies it. Both from the literary and the musical point of view, it is one of the gems of mediæval song:

“ Entre le bœuf et l’âne gris,
Dors, dors, dors le petit fils:
Mille anges divins,
Mille séraphins
Volent à l’entour de ce grand Dieu d’amour.
Dors, dors, Roi des anges, dors!

¹ II, p. 87.

² There is an interesting article on *Noëls* by E. Fournier in *l’Encyclopédie du dix-neuvième siècle*.

“ Entre les roses et les lys,
 Dors, dors, dors le petit fils:
 Mille anges divins,
 Mille séraphins
 Volent à l'entour de ce grand Dieu d'amour.
 Dors, dors, Roi des anges, dors !

“ Entre les pastoureux jolis
 Dors, dors, dors le petit fils.”¹

These lyrics which we have attempted to characterize needed no scribes to write them down, no manuscripts to preserve them, for like Vergil's Fame, they flew from mouth to mouth. They were carried by sailor, by soldier, by trader, wherever the French or Normans pushed their way. They were brought to Germany, to Italy, to Portugal, and even had there been no Norman king at London, they would have been sung in England. Not only did the French bring them, but English clerks returning from Paris had learned, with their mediæval logic, these French songs. Paris had become the intellectual center of Europe, “the Paradise of the world,” Richard of Bury called it, and English students, in large numbers, flocked to its University:

“ Urbs beata Parisius
 * * * *
 Studio locus proprius
 Civis clero propitius,
 Ad quam redire cogitur,
 Quisque ab ea fugerit.”²

¹ F. A. Gevaert: *Collection de chœurs sans accompagnement pour servir à l'étude du chant d'ensemble*, 7e Fascicule, Paris, N. D. This Noël appears in seventeenth century collections. Cf. Weckerlin, *Chansons populaires*, vol. I, p. 54.

² G. M. Dreves, *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, vol. XXI, p. 1832. See O. Hubatsch, *Die lateinischen Vagantenlieder des Mittelalters*, Görlitz, 1870; J. A. Schmeller, *Carmina Burana*, Breslau, 1894.

There they heard the *poésie populaire* and echoes of the *chanson courtoise*; there they learned the *Noëls*; and in the vast cathedral of Notre Dame, the noblest in Christendom, they saw the home of the worship of Mary and heard the songs and hymns in her praise. The *poésie populaire* as the *chanson courtoise* sang of the Virgin as of an earthly maiden; if "Je suis a vous comme amant à sa mie" could be addressed to Christ, the lyrics to the Virgin more openly employed the very phrases of the love poems. Moreover, these *scholares vagantes*, sometimes defrocked clerks, students drifting from University to University, turning minstrel to gain their bread, had a body of Latin songs of their own, generally of wine and women. The church regarded them with abhorrence; they were *clerici ribaudi maxime, qui dicuntur de familia Goliæ*, but the common people heard them and they became the intermediaries between the folk song and the verses of the poets. This Latin verse, which gave more than phrases to the English lyric, is a most interesting study. We can give but one example:

"Tempus adest floridum,
surgunt namque flores,
vernales mox in omnibus
jam mutantur mores.
Hoc quod frigus leserat,
reparant calores,
cernimus hoc fieri
per multos colores

"Stant prata plena floribus,
in quibus nos ludamus.
Virgines cum clericis
simul procedamus,
per amorem Veneris
ludum faciamus,
ceteris virginibus
ut hoc referamus.

"O dilecta domina,
 cur sic alienaris?
 An nescis, o carissima
 quod sic adamaris?
 Si tu esses Helena,
 vellem esse Paris:
 tamen potest fieri
 noster amor talis."¹

It need hardly be stated that "Heu quam felix ist jam vita potatoris" is the burden of many of the poems. These Latin drinking songs antedate any that exist in French; Rabelais cites many old songs, but not a drinking song, and in his *Propos des buveurs*, where one would have been highly appropriate, he writes, "Chantons, beuvons: un *motet*—enton-nons!"²

We have now reviewed the lyric forms that left their impress on English song—the troubadour verse and the trouvère imitations of it, the *poésie populaire*, the *Noëls*, the songs of the wandering scholars, and to these we should add the Latin hymns, especially the large number that dealt with the lamentations of Mary at the foot of the cross—the *planctus Mariæ*. The influence of these writings did not overpower and crush into weak imitation the English lyrical spirit; it awakened it, enlarged its scope, and enriched its utterance, for despite its French element, the new lyric that arose was unmistakably English in thought and feeling.

¹ *Carmina Burana*, p. 183. "Now comes the time of flowers, and the blossoms appear; now in all things comes the transformation of Spring. What the cold harmed, the warmth repairs, as we see by all these colors. The fields in which we play are full of flowers. Maidens and clerks, let us go out together, let us play for the love of Venus, that we may teach the other maidens. O my chosen one, why dost thou shun me? Dost thou not know, dearest, how much thou art loved? If thou wert Helen, I would be Paris. So great is our love that it can be so." Cf. J. A. Symonds, *Wine, Women and Song*, London, 1884.

² J. Tiersot, *Histoire de la chanson populaire en France*, Paris, 1889, p. 218.

II

Although the earliest lyrics were songs, no Old English lyric with musical setting has been preserved. A graceful French love song, dating from about 1175, is our oldest lyric with musical accompaniment written in England. It was set down in the outside page of a Latin rejoinder to an epistle of St. Bernard which attacked the luxury of the Cluniac monks:

“ De ma dame vull chanter,
Ke tant est bele e bloie: (Qui)
Se mi peusse aseurer,
Trestut sen seroie:” (Trestôt)

it begins, and the first stanza ends with a line that re-echoes through many a later song,

“ Aura ele ja merci de mei?”¹

No doubt there were English translations or adaptations of such songs, but we have no traces of them; and there is no Middle English lyric to which we may ascribe so early a date. One of the first poems written after the Norman Conquest is the so-called *Poema Morale* or *Moral Ode*, a translation from the Latin. It was a most popular composition; it exists in seven manuscripts, of which the oldest dates from the late twelfth or the early years of the thirteenth century, and there is reason for believing that this oldest version is based on a still earlier manuscript that has been lost. The poem begins in the elegiac mood:

“ Ich em nu alder thene ich wes awintre and a lare.
Ich welde mare thene ich dede mi wit ahte bon mare.
Wel longe ich habbe child ibon a worde and a dede,
Thah ich bo a wintre ald to yung ich em on rede.”

¹ *Early Bodleian Music*, ed. by Sir John Stainer, London, 1901, vol. II, pp. 1-2.

" I am now older than I was in years and in lore,
 I wield more than I did, my wit ought to be more,
 Well long have I been a child in words and in deeds,
 Though I be old in years, too young am I in wisdom."¹

But after a few verses telling us that old age has stolen upon the writer unaware, the personal element fades away; the confessions of the opening lines are forgotten in the admonitions of the preacher; and the poem becomes practically a sermon, with descriptions of dooms-day, the pains of Hell, the joys of Paradise. Nothing is more fatal to the lyric than didacticism; unfortunately for the history of English song, our earliest writers failed to perceive that a man cannot preach and sing at the same time.

Almost contemporaneous with this homily is the far more interesting *on God Ureisun of Ure Lefdi, A Good Orison of our Lady*, which dates from about 1210.² It is a love poem addressed to the Virgin; the troubadours might have written it, if we regard merely the thought. It depicts Heaven as a place where the friends of Mary, adorned with royal robes, bracelets and gold rings which she has bestowed, enjoy

" Mirths manifold, without trouble or annoy;
 Music and games, abundance of life's pleasure, and eternal play;"

indeed we have what well may be a reminiscence of the old May dances:

" Merry sing the angels before thy face,
 Playing, carolling, and singing."

¹ *Early English Text Society*, vol. XXXIV, p. 159. Cf. *Anglia*, XXX, p. 217.

² W. Marufke, *Der Älteste Englische Marienhymnus, Breslauer Beiträge*, Leipzig, 1907, p. 16.

This, too, is a homily, yet it has its lyrics:

“ Mi leoue lif, urom thine luue ne schal me no thing to-dealen.
Vor othe is al ilong mi lif and eke min heale.
Vor thine luue i swinke and sike wel ilome.
Vor thine luue ich ham ibrouht in to theoudome.
Vor thine luue ich uorsoc al that me leof was.
And yef the al mi suluen: looue lif, ithench thu thes.”¹

“ My dear life, from thy love shall nothing separate me,
For on thee depends my life and also my salvation.
For thy love I toil and sigh very often,
For thy love I am brought into bondage,
For thy love I forsook all that was dear to me,
And gave thee all myself. Dear life, think thou of that.”

This is a new theme for English verse; there are no such poems to the Virgin in Old English. The prayers and hymns to Mary are a study in themselves, far too great for the limits of a single chapter, and we must content ourselves with mentioning later some typical songs to the

“ Levedi, flour of alle thing, (Lady)
Rosa sine spina.”

It must not be thought, because these early poems are religious, that the secular lyric did not flourish. We have lost many a love song, many a dance lyric, because they were deemed unworthy of preservation. Even if a scribe felt the charm of worldly song, he must turn a deaf ear to it. There is an interesting stanza by Hoccleve, written some two centuries after the *God Ureisun*:

¹ *E. E. T. S.*, vol. XXXIV, p. 191, ll. 95-100.

"Thise artificers, se I day be day, (These workmen)
 In the hotteste of al her bysynesse, (their)
 Talken and synge, and makë game and play
 And forth hir labour passith with gladnesse;
 But we laboure in traueillous stilnesse;
 We stowpe and stare vpon the shepës skyn,
 And keepë muste our song and wordës in."¹

The scribes may not sing at their work, yet they must have known the songs of the folk; the lyrics of the people must have floated through the very windows of the scriptorium, and some of them could not be "kept in." When the first secular lyrics appear we are not surprised to find them stealing in furtively on an empty page in a book of prayers, on the margins of a Psalter, or on the blank spaces of a legal document.

It is often asserted that *Sumer is icumen in* is the first English lyric with music, but on an empty leaf of a Psalter in the Bodleian is a song whose notation is certainly a quarter of a century older; we may date it about 1225. It is a complaint, very probably a lover's sadness, simpler and fresher in its expression than the French song we have cited. It has the mediæval dread of winter, for it was written centuries before the leafless trees and the snow-covered hills seemed beautiful to any one:

"Mirie it is while sumer ilast
 With fugheles song; (birds)
 Oc nu necheth windes blast (But now neareth)
 And weder strong. (storm)
 Ei, ei what this night [is] long!
 And ich with wel michel wrong
 Soregh and murne and fast."² (Sorrow)

¹ E. E. T. S., *Extra Series*, vol. LXI, p. xvii.

² *Early Bodleian Music*, London, 1901, vol. II, p. xvii; Chambers and Sidgwick, *Early English Lyrics*, London, 1907, p. 3.

If we place beside this winter piece that spring song of pure, unreflecting joy, the joy of a child in the open air and sunlight:

“ Sumer is icumen in,
Lhude sing cuccu; (loud)
Groweth sed and bloweth med
And springeth the wde nu,” (wood now)

(fortunately it is so well known that we need not quote it) we shall see that in its beginnings the English lyric drew much of its inspiration from the outer world. We have explained that in the French lyric the descriptions of nature became conventional ornaments, often having not the slightest connection with the spirit of the poem; in the English lyrics the outer life of nature and the inner life of man are joined in sympathy—“Man is one world and hath another to attend him”—and spring and winter, birds and flowers, share in the moods of the poets and reveal them to us. Viewed as a whole, the English lyric is unequalled in its descriptions of nature. As we trace its development, we shall frequently illustrate this statement.

Thus far we have seen nothing of folk song. The lyrics set to carefully written music are certainly not of the people; the harmony of *Sumer is icumen in* possesses “ingenuity and beauty, in a degree still difficult to realize as possible to a thirteenth century composer.” An anecdote in the *Gemma Ecclesiastica* of Giraldus Cambrensis tells of the folk singing their songs about the church. The priest had listened to them for when he should have intoned at the altar “Dominus vobiscum,” he sang, in the English tongue, in a loud voice before all the people, “Swete lamman dhin are” (sweet love, thine aid), to the great scandal of his bishop. This story belongs to the closing years of the twelfth century. We catch no glimpse of folk song until the first half of the thirteenth century, and then only in a few lines pre-

served on the leaf of a manuscript in the Bodleian, the opening verses of some eleven songs—only two are French—jotted down by a minstrel to aid his memory. In some cases only a single line is left:

“Ichauē a mantel i-maket of cloth,”

and we have but three lines of one which begins charmingly

“Al gold Jonet is thin her.” (thine hair)

There is a delicious bit of romance in the song of the maiden that “in the moor lay sevenights full”

“Wat was hire mete? (her meat)

the primerole ant the violet.

Welle wat was hire dryng? (her drink)

the chelde water of (the) welle spring.”

Most interesting is the fragment of a dance song, an English *carole*:

“Icham of Irlaunde,

ant of the holy londe

of irlande.

gode sir, pray ich the,

for of saynte charite

come ant daunce wyt me

in irlaunde.”

and the oldest English drinking song is found in the few lines:

“dronken, dronken, y-dronken,

() is tabart atte wyne.

hay () suster, walter, peter!

ye dronke al depe,

a(nt) ichulle eke.”

Such fragments but remind us how much of English folk song we have lost.¹

¹ *Anglia*, XXX, p. 173.

We have now reached the middle of the thirteenth century, and come to three hymns to the Virgin and God. These poems, with their music, are found in a manuscript in Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Written in a much-used verse form, they show a decided advance in metrical facility over the religious songs we have cited:

"Edi beo thu heuene quene, (Blessed be thou)
folkes froure & engles blis; (comfort)
moder unwemmed & maiden clene, (Mother unspotted)
swich in world non other nis.
on the hit is well eth sene (easily seen)
of alle wimmen thu hauest thet pris.
mi swete leuedi her min bene (lady hear my prayer)
& reu of me yif thi wille is."

The second, in the same metre, is much more graceful:

"Moder milde, flur of alle, (flower)
thu ert leuedi swuthe treowe. (sweet and true)
bright in bure & eke in halle, (bright in bower)
thi loue is euer iliche neowe:
on the hit is best to calle;
swete leudi, of me thu reowe, (thou rue)
ne let me neure in sunnes falle (never in sins)
the me yarked bale to breowe."¹

We may observe that these hymns do not seem so plainly written for music as do the secular lyrics. A contemporaneous song for two voices—once more a love lament—will show the difference:

"Foweles in the frith,
The fisses in the flod:
And I mon waxe wod, (must become mad)
Mulch sorwe I walke with (sorrow)
For beste of bon and blod."²

¹ *E. E. T. S.*, vol. LIII, pp. 255 ff.

² *Early Bodleian Music*, vol. II, p. 10; *Early English Lyrics*, p. 5.

Here is the thought and mood at once expressed; but the hymns are long drawn out and we cannot quote them in their entirety. There is a very interesting poem written by a certain Thomas de Hales for a maiden dedicated to God, showing her that Christ is her lover. As Mr. Chambers has pointed out in his essay on the mediæval lyric—at once the most informing and the most appreciative essay on the early English lyric that has yet appeared—it is the best example of the tendency to adapt deliberately “the structure and conventions of amorous poetry to pious uses in songs of spiritual love-longing.”¹ It is equally interesting to notice that this long poem of twenty-six stanzas was intended to be sung. Here is a typical passage showing that the great ones of the earth pass away, a common theme in mediæval poetry:

“ Hwer is paris and heleyne,
 that weren so bryht and feyre on bleo. (fair in hue)
 Amadas, tristram, and dideyne,
 Yseude and alle theo, (those)
 Ector with his scharpe meyne, (strength)
 And cesar riche of worldes feo, (world's wealth)
 Heo beoth iglyden ut of the reyne, (They are) (out of the
 kingdom)
 so the scheft is of the cleo.”² (as the shaft out of the
 bowstring)

As we read this we do not think instinctively of a musical accompaniment, yet in the last verse we hear the poet admonishing the maiden:

“ Hwenne thu sittest in longynge, (When)
 drauh the forth this ilke wryt; (draw)
 Mid swete stephne thu hit singe, (sweet voice)
 And do al so hit the byt.” (as it bids thee)

¹ *Early English Lyrics*, p. 287.

² *E. E. T. S.*, vol. XLIX, pp. 95 ff.

It was because the world was very evil, because earthly love and beauty passes away, that the poets fixed their love on the Virgin:

“ Mon, wi seestu loue ant herte (Man, why settest thou
love and heart)
on worldesblisse that nout ne last? (will not last)
wy tholestu that te so ofte smerte, (why sufferest thou)
for loue that is so unstedefast?
thu likest huni of thorn iwis, (honey)
that seest thi loue on worldesblis,
for ful of bitternis hit is,”¹

runs a song, jotted down, about 1265, in a Psalter, but Mary, “flour of all,” can give joy that endures:

“ On hire is al my lif ilong,
Of hwam ich wille synge, (Of whom)
And heryen hire ther-a-mong (praise her)
Heo gon us bote brynge (She brought us salvation)
Of helle pyne that is strong.
Heo brouhte us blysse that is long,
Al thureh hire childthinge. (through her childbearing)
Ich bidde hire on my song.”²

Generally these poems are songs of praise or devotion, protestations of love, but we hear also the personal note of confession:

“ Ifurn ich habbe isunched mid worke and mid worde, (Long
ago) (sinned)
hwile in mine bedde and hwile atte borde,
Ofte win idrunke and selde of the forde, (seldom of the
stream)
muchel ich habbe ispended: to litel ich habbe an horde.”³

¹ *Early Bodleian Music*, vol. II, p. 7.

² *E. E. T. S.*, vol. XLIX, p. 159. Cf. p. 196.

³ P. 193.

runs one prayer to the Virgin, and though Christ is besought to aid the sinner, more hymns are addressed to the one

“ that is so fayr and bright
velud maris stella,
 Brighter than the day is light,
parens et puella;
 Ic crie to the, thou se to me;
 Leuedy, preye thi sone for me,
Tam pia,
 Than ic mote come to the,
*Maria!*¹”

Of all the songs to the Virgin none were more popular than those that described her sorrow at the foot of the cross—the *Planctus Mariæ*, the Complaint of Mary, to give the Latin title which indicates the churchly origin of these poems. Her own sufferings gave her sympathy for man in his distress:

“ Ladi seinte Marie: Corteis, feir & swete!
 ffor loue of the teres: that for thi sone thou lete
 Whon thou seye him hongon: Nayled honden and fete, (thou
 saw)
 Thou sende me grace in eorthe: Mi sunnes forte bete.”²

and accordingly the poets loved to dwell on her sorrows. Often, however, hearing the Virgin’s lamentations, they sang only of her anguish and forgot their own fears. These are among the most pathetic lyrics in Middle English; conventional as a class, their theme admitted of variations. At times it is Mary at the cross we see; at others, it is Mary singing her child to sleep and weeping as she foresees his death. The popularity of these songs is strikingly shown by the large number that have been preserved in various manu-

¹ P. 194.

² *Ibid.*, vol. XCVIII, p. 31.

scripts, the oldest dating from 1250. Priests, clerks, writers of miracle plays composed them and very few of these poems fail to touch our feelings.

III

The Harleian MS. No. 2253, beautifully written and splendidly preserved, is one of the most valued possessions of the British Museum. It is an anthology, our finest collection of Middle English lyrics, dating from about 1310, for it contains an elegy on Edward I who died in 1307. On the other hand, some of the poems were composed long before this, for example, the song on the battle of Lewes (1264); thus the lyrics extend over a period of fifty years. It has been conjectured that the scribe—the anthologist, we might call him—lived at Leominster Abbey in Herefordshire, but we know nothing concerning him.¹ Surely we may infer that he had lived the life of a student.

"Scripsi hæc carmina in tabulis!"

Mon ostel est en mi la vile de Paris:

May y sugge namore, so wel me is; (I may say no more)

Yef hi deye for love of hire, duel hit ys."² (grief it is)

runs one of the poems, and from his predilection for French verse, it is probable that as a clerk he had spent much of his time *en mi la vile*; it seems, however, too strong an inference to speak of his wild student days for which he atoned in the cloister, as does the best editor of the MS.³ At all events, we know that he loved nature; that he had been stirred by patriotism; and that he had felt the charm of youth and romance. Whether or not he composed any of these poems

¹ T. Wright, *Specimens of Lyric Poetry*, Percy Society Publications, vol. IV, London, 1842, Preface vi-viii.

² P. 65.

³ K. Böldcker, *Altenglische Dichtungen des MS. Harl. 2253*. Berlin, 1878.

(their dialects show different hands), his tastes reveal a poetic temperament, for the MS. is nothing more or less than a book in which the writer has copied whatever interested him. There is no attempt at arrangement; Latin, English, Anglo-Norman—prose and verse, hymn, love song, patriotic ballad—follow each other at haphazard. Though there is no music in these pages, the musical setting is clearly indicated, not so much by such lines as

“Y wole mone my song.”

“Alle that beoth of huerte trewe,
a stounde herkneth to my song.”

“Lystneth, Lordynges, a newe song ichulle bigynne.”¹

but rather by the lilt of the poems, and most of all, by their refrains:

“Richard, thah thou be euer trichard, (traitor)
tricchen shalt thou neuer more.” (betray)

“Euer and oo for my leof icham in grete thohte, (Always)
(great care)
y thenche on hire that y ne seo nout ofte.” (I think) (I
do not see oft)

“An hendy hap ichabbe yhent, (A gracious fortune I
have grasped)
ichot, from heuene it is me sent, (I wot)
from alle wymmen mi loue is lent (is turned)
Ant lyht on Alysoun.”

or in what was surely the chorus of a folk song:

“Blow, northerne wynd,
sent thou me my suetyng! (sweetheart)
blow, northerne wynd,
blou, blou, blou.”²

¹ Pp. 174, 140, 126.

² Pp. 98, 179, 147, 168.

The political songs, vivid and forceful in style, are not the best. They are interesting, as Ritson observed of the gruesomely realistic poem on the execution of Fraser, chiefly because they contain "a variety of little incidents not noticed by historians." Of this group of lyrics, the *Husbandman's Complaint* has the most feeling; we hear in it the bitter cry of the poor, ground down by taxes and levies. In modern dress, it begins as follows:

"I heard men upon the mould make much moan,
How they were harassed in their tilling,
Good ears and corn, both are gone,
We tell no tales, no songs we sing.
Now must we work, other way there is none,
I may no longer live from my gleanings,
But there is a bitterer bite to the bone,
For ever the fourth penny goes to the king."

Thus the song runs on,

"It is hard to lose where there little is,
And we have many who look to us,"

a complaint of the oppressed, hunted like hares, deprived of their scanty earnings.¹

Of the one hundred and seventeen pieces that compose the collection, the English lyrics, some forty in number, alone concern us. Of these the love lyrics are by far the best, and it is a misfortune that their somewhat difficult dialect has kept them from being generally appreciated, though *Alysoun*, the finest of the series, is familiar to readers of anthologies. We discover at once in these poems the influence of the French lyric curiously blended with purely English qualities. We hear an echo of troubadour verse when we read of a maiden who dwells in a tower guarded by

¹ P. 109.

knights and attendants, or of another adorned in a girdle of beaten gold set with a stone that turns water to wine, and who has

“lefty rede lippes lele (leal, true)
romaunz forte rede.” (romances for to read)

We hear it, too, when a poet mourns that he has broken the rules of the “book of ladies love.”¹ Such heroines, one would say, are not English maidens, but Châtelaines who must be approached with reverence:

“Adoun y fel to hire anon
ant crie: ‘Ledy, thyn ore!
ledy, ha mercy of thy mon!’”²

This note recurs again and again:

“Leuedy of alle londe,
Les me out of bonde, (Loose me from the bonds)
broht icham in wo;
haue resting on honde,
ant sent thou me thi sonde (message)
sone, er thou me slo;
my reste is with the ro.”³ (roe)

The disfavor of these heroines is fatal:

“To dethe thou hauest me diht,
y deye longe er my day,”

yet the sad plight of these true lovers does not always move their compassion:

“Nys no fur so hot in helle (There is no fire)
al to mon, (compared to the man)
that loueth derne ant darnout telle (loveth secretly)
whet him ys on.”

¹ Pp. 179, 157, 156, 152.

² P. 179.

³ P. 149.

or

"Ich vnne hire wel, ant heo me wo; (I wish) (she me woe)
 ycham hire frend, ant heo my fo; (and she my foe)
 me thuncheth min herte wol breke a two (me thinketh)
 for sorewe and syke!"¹

This is indeed *la grande passion*, and there is but one poem in the MS. that is plainly satirical in its treatment of women.² The derivation of these love complaints is not hard to find, for such learned comparisons as:

"Ichot a burde in a bour ase beryl so bryht, (I know a maid)
 ase saphyr in seluer semly on syht, (silver)
 ase jasje the gentil, that lemeth with lyht, (gleameth)
 ase gernet in golde, and ruby wel ryht."

and the personifications are a direct inheritance from the French.³ The metres too come from across the channel. We have the Old English alliteration in line after line

"weary as water in a weir,"

"as saphyr in seluer semly on syht,"

but the varied rhyme forms are echoes from the troubadours, and we find among them that strophe we have quoted from Guillaume de Poitiers. One point is particularly noticeable—the frequent use of the monorhymed stanza. Richard Cœur de Lion had employed it; Walter Mapes used it in his *Mihi est propositum*; it will be seen in the early hymns we have cited. To-day it is rarely found, as in the song:

"My love's an arbutus by the borders of Lene,
 So slender and shapely in her girdle of green,
 And I measure the pleasure of her eye's sapphire sheen
 By the blue skies that sparkle through the soft branching
 screen."

¹ Pp. 150, 162, 163.

² P. 151.

³ P. 145, cf. p. 170.

Even in the more complicated verse forms, the constant recurrence of the same rhyme is a favorite device. Though we read these songs in our modern pronunciation, we find in them a delightful and varied music, the promise of the melodic richness which was to characterize the later lyric.

Despite these strongly marked French traits both in subject-matter and rhythm, the songs are thoroughly English—new wine has been poured into old bottles. These maidens are, after all, women who may be won, and since doughty deeds are not for wandering students, love complaints may move them. As one poet observes philosophically:

“Bētere is tholien whyle sore, (to suffer)
then mournen euermore,”

and they are not so hopeless as they would appear to be:

“with thy loue, my suete leof, mi blis thou mihtes eche,
a suete cos of thy mouth mihte be my leche.” (kiss) (my
healing)

They see a happiness in store for them as it is pictured in the close of this charming duet:

“Whil y wes a clerc in scole, wel muchel y couthe of lore,
ych haue tholed for thy loue woundes fele sore, (suffered)
(many)
fer from [hom] ant eke from men vnder the wode gore;
(wood’s edge)
suete ledy, thou rewe of me, nou may y no more!”

“thou semest wel to ben a clerc, for thou spekest so stille,
shalt thou neuer for mi loue woundes thole grylle; (suffer
fierce wounds)
fader, moder, and al my kun ne shal me holde so stille,
that y nam thyn, and thou art myn, to don al thi wille.”¹

¹ P. 173.

When the background of personification or long-drawn-out similes is strictly conventional, we have fresh and delightful portraits of English maidens, dwelling "by west":

"Hire hed when ich biholde apon,
the sonnebeem aboute noon
me thohte that y seye."¹

or

"Hyre heye haueth wounded me ywisse, (eye)
hire bende browen, that bringeth blisse,
hire comely mouth that mihte cusse, (he that might kiss)
in muche murthe he were.
y wolde chaunge myn for his (my lot for his)
that is here fere." (her mate)

"Ich wolde ich were a threstelcok,
a bountying other a lauerok, (lark)
swete bryd!
bituene hire curtel ant hire smok
y wolde ben hyd."²

It is the hope, seen even in the saddest complaints, expressing itself in naïve asides

"Hire swyre is whittore then the swon (neck)
Ant feyrest may in toune." (fairest maid in the district)

or

"gret hire wel, that swete thing
with eynen gray,"

that gives to these poems their freshness.

One of the most engaging characteristics of these songs is the frequent reference to nature. We remember that in the *poésie courtoise* it was a convention to begin a song with some allusion to nature, no matter what the subject. A broadly satiric description of Henry III and his desire to

¹ P. 155.

² Pp. 162, 163.

invade France commences: "Now comes the time of May, when the rose will open, when the weather is fair and the nightingale sings; when the meadows become green and the gardens bloom. I have found something that I shall relate." These English songs, too, begin with a picture of a country roadside in May; or of a garden of flowers, when the "lef is lyht on lynde," as in the well-known opening lines of *Alysoun*:

"Bytuene mersh ant aueril,
 when spray biginneth to springe,
 The lutel foul hath hire wyl
 on hyre lud to synge. (with her voice)
 Ich libbe in loue longinge
 for semlokest of alle thinge; (seemliest)
 He may me blisse bringe."¹ (she may)

or in this bit of melody:

"Lenten ys come with loue to toune, (Spring)
 with blosmen ant with briddes rounne, (birds' song)
 that al this blisse bryngeth;
 dayes-eyes in this dales,
 notes suete of nyhtegales,
 vch foul song singeth."² (each)

but such passages are no arbitrary introductions, for the love of nature, in which Ten Brink sees the folk song asserting itself, runs all through these lyrics, in similes and descriptions. Here the English poet surpasses his French masters for he has "more varied and richer details at his disposal, and is not wont to form an analogy of his personal sentiments with a certain phase of the life of nature, but rather lets his feelings appear as part of that life."³

¹ P. 147.

² P. 164.

³ G. Ten Brink, *Early English Literature to Wiclif*, trans. by Kennedy, N. Y., 1889, p. 305.

We can merely call attention to the "Man in the Moon," a pure bit of fun and probably our oldest humorous song unmixed with satire,¹ for we must turn to the religious lyrics in this manuscript. They are remarkable for their sincerity. We find in them no long-drawn-out moral platitudes, but rather ardent expressions of love for Christ and the Virgin; vivid, pathetic pictures of the crucifixion and Mary's grief; touching lamentations for sins committed; and the characteristic mediæval scorn of the world as an evil abode. We can illustrate these points only by brief quotations. The following lines written in the favorite monorhymed stanza are a good example of the hymn to Christ:

"Sute iesu, myn huerte gleem,
bryhtore then the sonne beem,
ybore thou were in Bedleheem,
thou make me here thi sute dreem. (song)

"Sute iesu, louerd myn, (lord mine)
my lyf, myn huerte, al is thin,
vndo myn herte, ant liht ther yn,
and wite me from fendes engyn."² (shield) (the fiend's
artifices)

The songs to Mary closely resemble the songs to Alysoun; though the poet writes of the Virgin, the following introduction might well serve for a love poem:

"Ase y me rod this ender day (other day)
by grene wode to seche play,
mid herte y thohte al on a may, (with my heart) (on a
maiden)
Suetest of alle thinge;
Lythe, ant ich ou telle may (Listen) (I may tell you)
al of that sute thinge."³

¹ Bōddeker, p. 176.

² Pp. 191, 192.

³ P. 218.

The adaptation of secular verse for religious purposes long persisted, and to-day the church has not disdained to borrow from the opera music for its hymns. None of Bach's chorales has a deeper religious significance than "O sacred head now wounded," yet he took the melody from an old German love song composed by Hans Leo Hassler. The Latin hymns of the church were frequently parodied for political and satirical purposes. In this manuscript we find side by side, written by the same hand, an amorous poem,

"Lutel wot hit anymon, (Little) (any man)
 Hou derne loue may stonde, (secret)
 bote hit were a fre wymmon, (unless it)
 that muche of loue had fonde,"

with a refrain taken possibly from a folk song:

"Euer ant oo for my leof icham in grete thohte, (and always)
 (care)
 y thenche on hire that y ne seo nout ofte;" (I do not often
 see)

and a religious poem that is its exact counterpart:

"Lutel wot hit anymon,
 hou loue hym haueth ybounde,
 that for vs othe rode ron, (on the rood)
 ant bohte vs with is wounde
 Euer ant oo, nyht ant day, he haueth vs in thohte,
 He nul nout leose that he so deore bohte."¹ (will not lose
 that which)

The pictures of the crucifixion are vivid and realistic as an altar piece by one of the old masters:

¹Pp. 178, 231.

“ Heye vpon a doune,
ther al folk hit se may, (where)
a mile from the toune,
aboute the midday,
the rode is vp arered; (cross)
his frendes aren afered,
ant clyngeth so the clay;
the rode stond in stone,
marie stont hire one, (stands alone)
ant seith ‘weylaway!’ ”¹

The *contemptus mundi* furnishes the pessimism in these songs:

“ Wel ichot, ant soth hit ys,
that in this world nys no blys, (there is no bliss)
bote care, serewe, ant pyne.”² (sorrow)

and this belief finds expression in one of the most beautiful poems in English literature. Its metre is perfectly adapted to the thought and the long, slow line that closes each stanza has a “dying fall,” a melancholy echo, like the last chords of a dirge:

“ Wynter wakeneth al my care,
nou this leues waxeth bare; (these branches)
ofte y sike ant mourne sare, (sigh)
when hit cometh in my thoht,
of this worldes ioie, hou hit geth al to noht.

“ Nou hit is, ant nou hit nys, (Now it is not)
also hit ner nere ywys; (as though it had never been)
that moni mon seith, soth hit ys: (what many)
al goth bote godes wille, (except God’s will)
alle we shule deye, thah vs like ylle.

¹ P. 211.

² P. 194.

“ al that gren me greueth grene,
 nou hit faleweth al bydene; (fadeth all suddenly)
 iesu, help that hit be sene,
 ant shild vs from helle,
 for y not whider y shal, ne hou longe her duelle.”¹ (For I
 know not) (I shall go)

If we compare the English and Anglo-Norman poems in this manuscript, we shall find that the English songs are not only more sincere in their feeling, but, what is rather surprising, more musical and artistic in their form. There is a curiously realistic Anglo-Norman poem on winter, or rather, on what winter means to the writer, which we may contrast with *Winter wakeneth all my care*. It is somewhat like comparing a Skeltonic outburst with a sonnet by Shakespeare, and indeed there is much of Skelton’s spirit in these lines:

“ When I see winter return
 (Which troubles me
 Because the season changes)
 Then I love a split log,
 Charred wood sputtering
 Embers flaring,
 Fire of twigs, for joy I sing
 For I love it so much.”²

After continuing in this strain, the writer proceeds to an enumeration, three pages in length, of what he likes to eat! The Anglo-Norman love poems are certainly less spontaneous, following established custom in laying down the laws

¹ P. 195.

² T. Wright, *Specimens of Lyric Poetry*, p. 13.

for true lovers, reading lessons in "fyn amour," or going to the other extreme and satirizing the follies of womankind:

"La pie de costume (The magpie)
Porte penne e plume
de divers colours;
E femme se delite
En estraunge habite,
de divers atours."

"La pie est jangleresse" but woman "d'assez jangle plus."¹ Without citing other examples, we may safely assert that at the beginning of the fourteenth century English song had not only learned a new melody and grace of expression from the French lyric, but rivalled and, in certain characteristics, surpassed it.

We have spent much time on MS. Harleian 2253 because it is the first collection of lyrics in the English language, and because it represents practically all the moods of the lyrical spirit of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. It is a misfortune that our early lyrics are neglected and that they are regarded as the province of the philologist or of the student of the history of our literature. The difficulties of their language, supposedly great, are slight indeed, and their thoughts, quaintly expressed, are not utterly alien to our own, for we find many times that the strangeness lies in the form of expression. We do not need a special training to admire the early masters of painting though their technique and their methods are far removed from ours; we appreciate mediæval carving; we are thrilled

¹ P. 107. On page 163 of this volume is a very graceful Anglo-Norman love song, with a refrain in the metre used in *Alysoun*:

"Je pri à Dieu e Seint Thomas,
Qe il la pardoigne le trespas!
E je se verrolement le fas
Si ele merci me crye."

by the beauty of the churches and cathedrals that arose at the very time these songs were in the making. Surely no one, though utterly unskilled in mediæval literature, can fail to admire the feeling and the art of these early poets even when they see another world than ours. These lyrics are but miniatures when we compare them with the superb frescoes of later poets, yet "in small proportions we just beauties see," and they should be known to all who enjoy the art of the Middle Ages.¹

These lyrics we have discussed were written by clerks; consequently they show the marks of a certain degree of learning and culture. The folk lyric of this period, simpler and less sophisticated, has disappeared. We saw traces of it in some of the refrains, and we get a glimpse of it in a poem written about 1303 in a law treatise preserved at Lincoln's Inn. The poet, riding in the woods, hears a "litel mai" singing:

" Now springes the sprai!—
Al for loue I am so seke (sick)
That slepen I ne mai."

" Sone i herde that mirie note; (Soon)
Thider I drogh; (I drew)
I fond hire [in] an herber swote (arbor sweet)
Under a bogh,
With ioie inogh.
Sone I asked 'Thou mirie mai,
Hwi singestou ai'? (Why singest thou ay)
Now springes the sprai.

¹ Chambers and Sidgwick's *Early English Lyrics* should win for our early songs the popular recognition they so richly deserve. This collection, indispensable for the study of the lyric, can hardly be praised too highly; it appeals with equal force to the scholar and to the general reader.

"Than answerde that maiden swote
 Mid wordes fewe—
 'Mi lemman me haues bi-hot (my love) (promised)
 Of loue trewe;
 He chaunges a-newe.
 Yif I mai, it shall him rewe (it shall repent him)
 Bi this day' "¹ (Concerning this day)

Here we have the woman's song, the oldest form of the *carole*.

In *Arthour and Merlin*, a translation of a French romance made shortly after 1300, we find a number of nature songs; they are not in the French, and they have no connection with the plot. It seems quite probable that they are snatches of folk song:

"Mirie time is Auerille,
 than scheweth michel of our wille;
 In feld & mede floures springeth,
 In grene wode foules singeth;
 Yong man wereth jolif, (becomes)
 & than proudeth man & wiif."²

IV

We have now reached the fourteenth century, and for the first time we meet the poets themselves. One of the earliest writers is Lawrence Minot, of whose career we know absolutely nothing except that the twelve war songs from his pen, preserved in a single manuscript, were evidently written

¹ *Modern Language Review*, vol. IV, p. 236; vol. V, p. 104. It was written as prose.

² E. Kölbing, *Arthour and Merlin*, ll. 259-264; cf. ll. 4675-4680, 7397-7400.

at the time of the events they describe, between 1333 and 1352. They have little grace either of metre or diction; but they are filled with life and action, and express with straightforward, vigorous utterance a nation's pride in battles won. As the editor of Minot has well said, "His predecessors in the political poem had attacked abuses, exposed grievances, or written in the service of a faction. He is the first to speak in the name of the English nation just awakened to a consciousness of its unity and strength."¹ The poems are directed against the archenemies of England—the Scotch and the French—and ring with the exultation of victory, even when in reality the English had the worst of the argument.

"Where er ye, Skottes of Saint Iohnes tounè?
 The boste of yowre baner es betin all doune;
 When ye bosting will bede sir Edward es boune (will offer) (is
 ready)
 For to kindel yow care and crak yowre crowne:
 He has crakked yowre croune, wele worth the while;
 Schame bityde the Skottes for thai er full of gile."²

Whatever Minot's career may have been, he certainly trailed a pike in a conquering army for he has the unmistakable *gaudia certaminis*. Though the comparison is by no means a fair one, yet if we place beside Minot's roughhewn lines the polished couplets of Addison's *Campaign*, we instantly perceive the difference that exists between the war songs of a soldier and the compliments of a courtier. Minot has his heroes, and his poems give the honor roll of English valor, as in his song on the defeat of the French at the sea fight at Sluys, 1340:

¹ J. Hall, *Poems of Laurence Minot*, Oxford, 1887, p. xiii.

² P. 5.

“ The gude Erle of Glowceter, God mot him glade,
 Broght many bold men with bowes ful brade;
 To biker with the Normandes baldely thai bade (to fight)
 And in middes the flode did tham to wade;
 To wade war tho wretches casten in the brim; (in the sea)
 The kaitefs come out of France at lere tham to swim. (to
 learn)

“ I prays Iohn Badding als one of the best;
 Faire come he sayland out of the suthwest,
 To proue of tha Normandes was he ful prest, (full ready)
 Till he had foghten his fill he had neuer rest.”¹

Minot well understood how to use proper names effectively, and in this respect he may be named with Scott:

“ Day set on Norham’s castled steep,
 And Tweed’s fair river, broad and deep,
 And Cheviot’s mountains lone.”

We leave his poems with this cry of triumph over Crecy (1346):

“ Oway es all thi wele, i-wis,
 Franche man, with all thi fare;
 Of murning may thou neuer mys,
 For thou ert cumberd all in care:
 With speche ne moght thou neuer spare
 To speke of Ingliss men despite;
 Now haue thai made thi biging bare, (thy house)
 Of all thi catell ertou quite.”² (thy goods art thou de-
 prived)

We approach the first commanding personality in English literature—Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?-1400)—and find to our surprise that his lyrics show but faint marks of his

¹ P. 16. It is interesting to compare Minot’s work with that of modern writers, in Christopher Stone’s *War Songs*, Oxford, 1908.

² P. 25.

genius. It is a commonplace to observe that Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton are the four greatest English poets—who shall stand beside them is the subject for debate—but it is not always remembered that of these four writers, Chaucer alone has left us no lyrics entirely worthy of his fame. Had Spenser written nothing but the *Prothalamion* and the *Epithalamion*, Shakespeare nothing beyond his songs and sonnets, Milton but his odes and sonnets, they would have been always honored as great poets who had given us

“soul-animating strains—alas, too few!”

If Chaucer's reputation depended on his lyrics, he would be little more than a half-forgotten name.

It was in 1372-1373, twenty-four years after the death of Laura, that Chaucer made his journey into Italy; it is possible that he had gone to Milan in 1368 for the marriage of Lionel Duke of Clarence. Whether or not he actually met Petrarch (and it seems probable) he must have heard his sonnets for they had won instant admiration; as a matter of fact, in *Troilus and Criseyde* Chaucer has translated, not following the form, Petrarch's quatorzain which begins “S'amor non è, che dunque è quel ch'io sento?”¹ In the *Monk's Tale*, Chaucer speaks of “my master Petrarch,” “the only place,” Professor Lounsbury observes, “in which he seriously gives this designation to any author whatever”;² yet Chaucer is not sufficiently impressed by the beauty of the *Canzoniere* either to introduce the sonnet form into English literature, or to imitate the Italian poet's lyrical treatment of love. On the other hand, Chaucer knew the English songs of his time, and it has often been pointed out that nearly all the Canterbury pilgrims are musical, from the squire who sang such love complaints as the Italians wrote, to the pardoner

¹ Lines 400-420.

² T. R. Lounsbury, *Studies in Chaucer*, New York, 1892, II, p. 224.

who well understood the attracting power of simple English ditties:

“ Full loude he song: Come hider love to me,”

yet if we wish to hear the songs of Chaucer's England, we must turn from the *Canterbury Tales* to the manuscript collections of lyrics by unknown writers. Shakespeare incorporates in his plays the popular lyrics of the day; Chaucer gives them a passing reference in a line or two.

The reason for this is sufficiently obvious. Chaucer had the temperament of the dramatist, of the story teller. When he studies the heart with its impulses and waverings; when he observes the passions and thoughts of men and women, he thinks of a tale and not of a song. The lyric poet asks nothing more than to express a single mood or emotion, detached, and sufficient unto itself; but in Chaucer the social instinct was strong and what he wished to study and to depict was the interplay of character. The humorous side of life, which appealed so strongly to him, can be expressed but very inadequately in lyric verse. In the *House of Fame* we are told that Chaucer had set his wit

“ to make bokes, songes, dytees,
In ryme, or elles in cadence,”

but the songs and ditties are not many.¹ The lyric seemed to him too small a province.

When Chaucer sought models for his lyrics, he turned to the writings of his French predecessors and contemporaries. “The note, I trowe, maked was in Fraunce,” he says of the rondel sung by the birds in the *Parlement of Foules*, but this applies to his other lyrics. His *A. B. C. to the Virgin* is not a hymn inspired by his own religious sentiment, but a translation from De Deguillville's *Pèlerinage de l'Ame*. He bases

¹ Ll. 622-623.

the three ballades that form the *Compleynt of Venus* on three ballades of Granson:

“ And eek to me hit is a greet penaunce,
Sith rym in English hath swich scarsitee,
To folowe word by word the curiositee
Of Graunson, flour of hem that make in Fraunce.”

There are undeniable strains of English song in his verse. We hear the earlier lyric in the following lines from the *Boke of the Duchesse*:

“ Lord, hit maketh myn herte light,
Whan I thenke on that swete wight
That is so semely on to see;
And wisshe to god hit might so be,
That she wolde holde me for her knight,
My lady, that is so fair and bright.”¹

and in these verses from his *Complaint to his Lady*:

“ My dere herte, and best beloved fo,
Why lyketh yow to do me al this wo,
What have I doon that greveth yow, or sayd,
But for I serve and love yow and no mo?
And whylst I live, I wol do ever so;
And therfor, swete, ne be~~th~~ nat evil apayd.
For so good and so fair as [that] ye be,
Hit were [a] right gret wonder but ye hadde
Of alle servants, bothe goode and badde;
And leest worthy of alle hem, I am he.”²

These passages are not so characteristic of Chaucer's lyrics as are his ballades, written not in the eight line stanza, but in the seven line rhyme royal. The best of them are marked by a dignified, earnest, eloquent utterance:

¹ Ll. 1175-1180.

² Ll. 64-73.

"That thee is sent, receyve in buxumnesse, (submission)
 The wrastling for this worlde axeth a fal.
 Her nis non hoom, her nis but wildernesse:
 Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste, out of thy stal!
 Know thy contree, look up, thank God of al;
 Hold the hye wey, and lat thy gost thee lede:
 And trouthe shal delivere, hit is no drede."¹

Among the best is *Lak of Stedfastnesse*, in which the poet laments that

"Trouthe is put down, resoun is holden fable;
 Vertu hath now no dominacioun,
 Pitee exyled, no man is merciable.
 Through covetyse is blent discrecioun;
 The world hath mad a permutacioun
 Fro right to wrong, fro trouthe to felkenesse,
 That al is lost, for lak of stedfastnesse."

The love ballades are not as successful.

"Hyd, Absolon, thy gilte tresses clere;
 Ester, ley thou thy meknesse al a-down,"

from the *Legend of Good Women*,² has melody but catalogues too much, giving us a list of names rather than a series of brief but vivid pictures, such as we find in Villon's incomparable *Ballade of Dead Ladies*. The *Triple Roundel of Merciles Beaute* is too obviously an imitation to possess much life; but there is one rondel of Chaucer's so graceful and musical that it deserves to be quoted and with it we leave his lyrics:

"Now welcom somer, with thy sonne softe,
 That hast this wintres weders over-shake,
 And driven away the longe nightes blake!

¹ *Truth*.

² Prologue, Text B, ll. 249-269.

“ Seynt Valentyn, that art ful hy on-lofte;—
 Thus singen smale foules for thy sake—
Now welcom somer, with thy sonne softe,
That hast this wintres weders over-shake.

“ Wel han they cause for to gladen ofte,
 Sith ech of hem recovered hath his make;
 Ful blisful may they singen whan they wake;
‘Now welcom somer, with thy sonne softe,
That hast this wintres weders over-shake,
And driven away the longe nightes blake.’ ”¹

If we compare this with the songs of the previous century, we see that the touch is firmer, the art is more sure, for it comes from the hand of a master.

We cannot leave the fourteenth century without a mention of two contemporaries of Chaucer—Richard Rolle and the unknown author of *The Pearl*. Rolle (d. 1349) is one of the most interesting characters of Mediæval England. Had he but founded an order, his name would have been known throughout the world, for he had the qualities of a great religious leader—intense convictions, an enthusiasm that bordered upon fanaticism, and the power to express his thoughts simply and vividly. He was both a dreamer and a man of action; he divided his life between mystic contemplation and preaching a practical, everyday morality to the peasants of Yorkshire. His poems have little grace or art; they are filled with emotion, for his religious fervor expresses itself directly, without reflection. Two stanzas are sufficient to show his style and his feeling:

“ My sang es in syghyng, whil I dwel in this way;
 My lyfe es in langyng, that byndes me nyght & day,
 Til I com til my kyng, that I won with hym may, (dwell)
 And se his fayre schynyng, & lyfe that lastes ay.”

¹ *Parlement of Foules*, ll. 680-692.

"Sygh & sob, bath day and nyght, for ane sa fayre of hew.
 Thar es na thyng my hert mai light, bot lufe, that es ay new.
 Wha sa had hym in his syght, or in his hert hym knew,
 His mournyng turned til joy ful bryght, his sang in til glew."¹
 (glee)

Whether or not we accept *The Pearl* as the actual record of a personal bereavement, the lyric element in the poem is lost in description, allegory, and even didacticism. The poem, certainly one of the most beautiful in our language, is not a series of moods treated lyrically, for its author considers not so much his own feelings as the visions he has invoked. The lyric poet uses the world of nature and the world of dreams to interpret his own feelings; the writer of *The Pearl* reverses this process and his feelings of grief or joy measure the power of his dreams. Despite certain lyrical stanzas, *The Pearl* lies outside our province.

V

If the fifteenth century showed, so far as the lyric is concerned,

"No master spirit, no determined road,"

it cannot be taunted with a "want of books and men." Hoccleve (1368?-1448) and Lydgate (1375-1449) followed Chaucer as best they could, and while in their verse schemes they showed a certain technical achievement, they lacked both his art and his inspiration. When Hoccleve writes a poem lamenting his ill-spent life, he gives us a rambling confession in fifty-six eight-line stanzas. His

¹C. Horstmann, *Richard Rolle of Hampole*, London, 1895, vol. I pp. 75, 78.

poetry is often personal; his *Complaint* narrates his sickness, his loss of reason, the desertion of his friends, but there is no lyric cry in it. At times he employs well-known lyric themes, but he cannot treat them lyrically:

“How fair thyng or how precious it be
That in the world is, it is lyk a flour,
To whom nature yeuen hath beautee (given)
Of fressh heewe and of ful pleasant colour;
With soote smellynge also, and odour; (sweet)
But as soone as it is bicomē drye,
Ffarwel colour and the smel gynneth dye.”¹

This is pretty crude, especially when we consider that we are approaching the sixteenth century. Much better is his *Modir of god*, long considered above his style and accordingly attributed to Chaucer.²

Lydgate is a more important figure, but a poor writer of lyrics. Like Hoccleve he is exasperatingly prolix, and although we find in his religious poetry lines and stanzas that have decided merit, the next page invariably destroys the effect. A recently discovered lyric, *The Child Jesus to Mary, the Rose*, has both sincerity of feeling and graceful expression, and exhibits the best traits of his work.³

This age produced a third poet whose work is contained in MS. 682 Harleian. It consists of a series of most interesting lyrics that are English translations of poems by Charles d'Orléans. For a considerable number of them no French originals have as yet been found, but in all probability they are merely English versions of work by Charles that has disappeared. This English translator (Professor MacCracken believes him to be Suffolk, the friend of

¹ *E. E. T. S., Extra Series, LXI, p. 119.*

² *P. 52.*

³ *E. E. T. S., Extra Series, vol. CVII, p. 78.*

Charles) was a skillful writer, for many of these lyrics have all the lightness and charm of the French.¹ What could be more delightful than the following rondel?

“ My gostly fadir, y me confesse,
First to god and then to yow,
That at a wyndow, wot ye how,
I stale a cosse of gret swetnes; (kiss)
Which don was out avisynes,
But hit is doon not undoon now.
My gostly fadir, I me confesse,
First to God and then to yow.

“ But y restore it shall dowlles
Ageyn if so be that y mow,
And that [to] God y make a vow.
And ellis y axe foryefnes. (else I ask)
My gostly fadir, I me confesse,
First to God and then to yow.”

If we believe this gay song to be modelled on some undiscovered French lyric, the following seems thoroughly English in both its theme and its expression:

“ This time when lovers althermost defie (most of all)
Eche hevye thought as ferforth as thei may, (as utterly)
And rise or phebus in the morow gray, (rise before)
Leiyng aside all slouthe and slogardy,
To here the birdis synge so lustily,
Ovyr the spryngyng bodies on the spray,
This tyme when lovers althermost defie
Eche hevye thought as ferforth as thei may.

¹ See *Publications of M. L. Association*, vol. XXVI, No. I, pp. 142-180.

“Thyn waylyng ón my pilow thus y ly,
For that as was and now is goon for ay,
Wisshyng no more but deth eche howre of day,
Saiyng ‘my hert, alas whi nelt thou day?’ (why wilt thou
not die)
This tyme when lovers althermost defie
Eche hev y thought as ferforth as thei may.”¹

As we leave these three writers—Hoccleve, Lydgate, and the translator of Charles d’Orléans—it is worthy of notice that the French metres they so assiduously cultivated, following Chaucer’s example, did not become a part and parcel of English verse. Despite Wyatt’s rondeaux, the Tudor lyrists and, above all, the Elizabethans cared nothing for the ballade or rondel. It was left for the poets of the nineteenth century to domesticate them.

More interesting than the works of these courtly makers are the more popular forms of the lyrics—the songs in the Miracle plays, the carols, and the large body of anonymous verse, secular and religious.

It is unquestionably true that many of the lyrics in the Mystery plays and in the Moralities are much older than the fifteenth century. The York cycle was composed about 1350, and the references in Chaucer to “pleyes of miracles” and to such stock characters as Noah and Herod prove conclusively that these dramatic entertainments were widely known in his day. Yet the Mysteries flourished particularly from 1400 to 1500; they have come down to us in manuscripts that date from that period; and it is quite probable that their lyrics, however old they may be, are preserved in fifteenth century form. For convenience we shall consider with the Mystery plays the Moralities also, though they were at their height in the first decades of the sixteenth century.

¹ *Poems written in English by Charles Duke of Orleans*, ed. by G. W. Taylor, Roxburghe Club, London, 1927, pp. 174, 177.

In reading these early dramas we are at once struck by their lyrical quality. They contain not only many songs but a large number of short poems, not written for music, yet expressing musically a deep personal emotion. Songs written for a single voice, for three parts, or for a chorus are introduced with such frequency that the scribes did not trouble to copy them, but merely indicated where they occurred. Evidently they could be easily supplied.

Presbyter: "now, boy, I pray thee lett vs have a song!

* * * * *

Boy: I home and I hast, I do that I may,
With mery tune the trebyll to syng."¹
(Synge both.)

We find the three part song in the Morality of *Wisdom*:

Mynde: "A tenor to you both I brynge.
Vnderstandyng: And I a mene for ony kyng.
Wyll: And but a trebyll I out-wrynge,
the deuyll hym spede that myrth exyled."²
(Cantent.)

Thus the shepherds in the Nativity plays arrange their parts:

primus pastor: "lett me syng the tenory.
iius pastor: And I the tryble so hye.
iiius pastor: Then the meyne fallys to me;
lett se how ye chauntt."³

It will be noticed that in none of these passages are the songs given. More often we find no such introduction for the lyrics but instead a stage direction, "Here shall enter a ship with a merry song," "Et tunc cantant," "Tunc cantant

¹ E. E. T. S., *Extra Series*, LXX, p. 101.

² P. 160.

³ Vol. LXXI, p. 122.

angeli Te Deum." The songs that are actually included in the text make us regret that so many have been lost. One of the best is sung by the "gossipes" who, with Noah's wife, refuse to enter the ark:

The Good Gossipes Songe.

"The flude comes fleeting in full faste,
 One every syde that spreades full fere;
 For feare of drowninge I am agaste;
 Good gossippes, lett us drawe nere
 And lett us drinke or we departe,
 For ofte tymes we have done soe;
 For att a draughte thou drinks a quarte,
 And soe will I do or I goe.
 Heare is a pottill full of Malmsine, good and stronge;
 It will rejoyce bouth harte and tonge;
 Though Noye thinke us never so longe,
 Heare we will drinke alike."¹

As Noah's wife sings with these roisterers, it is fair to assume that intemperance was not a vice peculiar to the Patriarch, but rather a family weakness and that quite possibly it was once more a woman who started the man on the downward path. From the very first line with its splendid alliteration, such a lyric is an excellent example of the popular drinking songs. Surely the unknown poet who wrote it caught the rollicking swing from some tavern catch.

While this song is adequate to the situation, many are not. Although David, for example, asserts:

"As god of heuen has gyffyn me wit,
 Shall I now syng you a fytt, (a song)
 With my mynstrelsy;"

¹ A. W. Pollard, *English Miracle Plays, Moralities and Interludes*, fifth ed., Oxford, 1909, p. 15. Cf. *E. E. T. S., Extra Series*, vol. LXII, p. 57.

his song does not justify his reputation:

“ Myrth I make till all men,
 With my harp and fyngers ten,
 And warn theym that they glad;
 ffor god will that his son down send,
 That wroght adam with his hend,
 And heuen and erthe mayde.”¹

Turning from actual songs, to short poems lyrical in their subjective spirit, we find that none are more beautiful than the verses spoken by the shepherds at Bethlehem:

“ Hayll, full of favoure,
 That made all of noght!
 Hayll! I kneyll and I cowre.
 A byrd haue I broght
 To my barne.
 Hayll, lytyll tyne mop!
 Of oure crede thou art crop:
 I wold drynk on thy cop,
 Lytyll day starne.

* * * * *

“ Hayll! swete is thy chere!
 My hart wold blede
 To se the sytt here
 In so poore wede,
 With no pennys.
 Hayll! put furth thy dall! (thy hand)
 I bryng the bot a ball:
 Haue and play the with all,
 And go to the tenys.”²

Surely Herrick must have remembered these lines when he wrote *To his Saviour, a Child*.

¹ *E. E. T. S.*, vol. LXXI, p. 59.

² *P.* 139.

There are so many lyrics in these plays that the choice is difficult; we have them from the lament of Adam, written in the metre employed by Guillaume de Poitiers,

“Gone ar my games with-owten glee,
 Allas! in blisse kouthe we noht bee,
 For putte we were to gret plente
 at prime of the day,
 By tyme of none alle lost had wee, (of noon)
 sa welawaye.”

to the praise of Christ, sung by eight burgesses as he enters Jerusalem:

“Hayll! dyamaunde with drewry dight, (jewel adorned)
 Hayll! jasper gentill of Jewry,
 Hayll! lyllly lufsome lemyd with lyght.”¹

It is evident that the secular lyric has been adapted in this passage, as in many others. Conversely, it would be easy to cite places where many of the Latin hymns of the church and religious lyrics in the vernacular were “taken over bodily by the play-writers and adapted to dramatic purposes,” especially the prayers to Christ and the Virgin and the lamentations of Mary at the cross, for the connection between the popular lyric and the Miracle plays was an extremely close one. As a whole these dramatic lyrics suffer from the chief fault of the plays of which they form a part—prolixity and lack of variety—yet many of them are extremely beautiful in their simple, naïve expression of great emotions, and all of them are deserving of study, for they are the stock from which sprung the flower of song in the Elizabethan drama.²

¹ L. T. Smith, *York Mystery Plays*, Oxford, 1885, pp. 32, 217.

² Despite Bell's *Songs from the Dramatists* and Bullen's *Songs from the Elizabethan Dramatists*, there is needed a more comprehensive anthology of the songs in the English drama, and the writer has one in preparation.

From 1400 to 1500 is the carol period *par excellence*. Though the tradition continued through the sixteenth century, and carol collections were printed during the seventeenth century, yet the Reformation began that suppression of Christmas festivity and song which the Puritan revolution accomplished; as it pulled down the shrines of the Virgin, so it destroyed the fabric of song which the carol makers had raised in her honor. The carols were the work of many hands; we know the names of but a few of the makers—John Audelay, a blind priest of Haughmond Abbey, Shropshire, who wrote about the year 1426, is one of the earliest.¹ It is easy to recognize the authorship of priest and clerk in the macaronic verse of many of the songs, or in such choruses as:

“ Mater, ora filium, vt post hoc exilium
Nobis donet gaudium beatorum omnium,”²

and in the numerous carols of wassailing, which beseech in the most open way a bountiful largess, we certainly see the hand of wandering singers.

Though many carols are preserved for us in the blank pages of MSS. containing more serious matter, six MSS. are especially rich in the collections of Christmas songs they contain; none of these go back as early as the first reference to Noël's in France. What is believed to be the oldest carol written in England is an Anglo-Norman wassail song that contains no reference whatever to the Nativity, but considers the season as a time for “li vins Engleis, e li Gascoin, e li Franceys” or for “joie d’amours.” It closes with the following stanzas:

¹ See Chambers and Sidgwick, *Fifteenth Century Carols by John Audelay*, *Modern Language Review*, vol. V, No. IV; VI, No. I. Cf. *Anglia*, vol. XVIII, p. 175.

² E. E. T. S., *Extra Series*, CI, p. 21.

"Seignors, jo vus di par Noel, (je vous dis)
 E par li sires de cest hostel,
 Car bevez ben: (buvez bien)
 E jo primes beverai le men, (je boirai le mien le premier)
 E pois après chescon le soen, (chacun le sien)
 Par mon conseil;
 Si jo vus di trestoz 'Wesseyl'! (Si je vous dis)
 Dehaiz eit qui ne dirra, 'Drincheyl!' " (Honi soit
 qui)¹

"Wesseyl" and "Drincheyll" are Saxon words, and undoubtedly they formed part of the pagan songs sung at the mid-winter feasts, songs which the church was unable to suppress and wisely turned to the pious uses of Christmas joy. There is probably, then, an element of old English poetry in some of the carols, but the influence of the French *Noëls* is much more apparent. Naturally there are a certain number of themes which must be treated in all Christmas songs, and the carols of every nation must resemble each other, but the carols on "My lord, sire Christmas," whom the early French jongleurs impersonated, and the very many choruses "Noël, Noël, Noël," clearly show the French provenance. The fact that these songs are called as a class "carols," and not "noëls," indicates that they were sung and danced, as were the old May songs, and were thus in the popular mind classed with the spring dance songs. The structure of many of the carols, two, three, or four lines on one rhyme, with a chorus, shows that they were well adapted for the dancing singers.¹

The carols may be roughly divided into songs of mirth and revelry, and songs on subjects connected, however remotely, with the nativity. The first group is interesting chiefly for its exuberance of good spirits. Hitherto the lyric has been chiefly amorous, contented to describe a lover's woes; here we have heart-easing mirth, whole-souled epicureanism,

¹ T. Wright, *Specimens of Old Christmas Carols*, Percy Society Publications, vol. IV, p. 2.

boisterous feasting, when the halls are decked with ivy and holly, when the boar's head is placed on the table, and the wassail bowl "spiced to the brim," is passed around:

*"Beuvez bien par tutte la company,
Make gode chere and be ryght merry,
And syng with us now joyfully,
nowell."*¹

How long these customs prevailed is shown by the echo of these carols in the more refined songs of Robert Herrick. From the literary standpoint, the best carols are written on the annunciation and the nativity. They sing the slumber songs of the Virgin; they show us the adoration of the shepherds, "joly Wat" and his companions; and they treat all these themes either with a childlike idealism which our sophisticated age cannot imitate, or with a realism equally remote from us because of its utter simplicity. Especially charming are the carols in praise of Mary, the Rose among maidens:

*"There is no rose of swich vertu
As is the rose that bare Jhesu.
Alleluia.*

*"For in this rose contained was
Hevene and erthe in litel space,
Res miranda."*

OR

*"Of a rose, a lovely rose,
Of a rose is all mine song.*

¹ P. 51.

The flour sprong in heye Bedlem,
 That is bothe bright and schene. (fair)
 The rose is Mary, hevene quene;
 Out of her bosum the blosme sprong."¹

It will be noticed that sentimentality, that blight of the modern religious song, is not found here.

The most beautiful of the carols made in honor of the Virgin, we might even say of all the carols, is "I sing of a maiden."

"He cam also stille
 Ther his moder was,
 As dew in Aprille
 That falleth on the grass.
 He cam also stille
 To his moderes bour,
 As dew in Aprille
 That falleth on the flour.
 He cam also stille
 There his moder lay,
 As dew in Aprille
 That falleth on the spray."²

Such refinement of melody is rare in any poetry. In the thought of the song we have strangeness added to beauty, mysticism expressed in the language of a child. But slightly inferior to this are some of the Virgin's slumber songs:³

"This endris night I saw a sight,
 A stare as bright as day;
 And ever among a maiden song,
 'Lullay, by by, lullay.'

¹ Pp. 105, 103.

² P. 107. For the genesis of this carol see *Modern Philology*, vol. VII, p. 165.

³ See *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. II, chapter xvi, N. Y., 1908.

“ ‘My dere moder, whan time it be,
 Thou take me up on loft,
 And sette me upon thy knee,
 And handell me full soft;
 And in thy arme thou hill me warme,
 And kepe night and day;
 If that I wepe, and may not slepe,
 Thou sing, By by, lullay.’ ”¹

but the tenderness changes to pathos when the child foretells what it must suffer:

“ A babe is born, our blysse to brynge,
 A maide ther was dyd lully and synge;
 She saide ‘dere sone, leve thy wepynge,
 Thy ffader ys the kyng of blis.’
 Synge we [with angelis, gloria in excelsis.]

“ ‘Lullay,’ she sange and saide also,
 ‘My nowne dere sone, why artow wo?
 Haue I not do that I sholde do?
 Thy grevaunce, telle me what it is!’

‘Nay, modir, for this wepe I nought,
 But for the wo that shal be wrought
 To me, er I mankynde haue bought:
 Was neuer no sorwe so lyk, I wys.’ ”²

If we turn from such songs to the shepherds:

“ Terly terlow, terly terlow,
 So merily the shepardes began to blow!”

we see that the range of the carols is no small one.

We have treated of the carols at some length because of all the early English songs they are the surest to survive; for if their words appeal to us, their setting is equally attractive. As a musical critic has pointed out: “Tunes of

¹ *Early English Lyrics*, p. 121.

² *Modern Language Notes*, vol. XXIV, No. 7, p. 225.

three centuries ago do not always seem very closely connected with individual subjects, and the constant resetting to other words which went on shows that they were not considered so by musicians of the time. 'Greensleeves,' as secular a song as ever was written, was sung to carol words while Cavaliers shouted it as a party watchword. . . . But the carols appeal to modern ears as perfect expressions of their subject. . . . The truth seems to be that at this early time musicians had arrived at just the right technique for the expression of the carol theme. Their church training had cultivated the instinct for pure melodic movement; their system of rhythmic modes, complicated as it seems to students who try to master it at the present day, taught them to reflect the metre of the poetry with extraordinary closeness, and at the same time, contrasted with the stiffness of the modern bar line, the musical effect of their work is wonderfully buoyant and free."¹ And apart from the beauty of their music, the carols possess a deep interest in the fact that they represent a lost art. We can never reproduce their simplicity—which is their greatest charm. In our carols that seem infused with the old time spirit, we see the modern touch in the too finely wrought antithesis, or in the adjective, too vivid and too descriptive, as in Christina Rossetti's:

" In the bleak mid-winter
 Frosty wind made moan,
 Earth stood hard as iron,
 Water like a stone;
 * * * * *
 " Enough for Him whom cherubim
 Worship night and day,
 A breastful of milk
 And a mangerful of hay."²

¹ *London Times*, Dec. 25, 1909.

² From *A Christmas Carol*.

We have but short space left for the large number of anonymous lyrics found in fifteenth century manuscripts; many have not been printed and there is an interesting field of work here for the student of our early poetry. It was in this age, above all other periods, that the ballads were composed. We shall not consider them, for, as we pointed out in our first chapter, they are dramatic narratives, little epics, rather than lyrics. Many of the ballads have purely lyrical stanzas, especially at their opening or close:

“ In somer when the shawes be sheyne, (groves) (fair)
And leves be large and long,
It is full mery in feyre foreste
To here the foulys song;”

yet as a class, these poems do not belong to our subject.

The anonymous songs differ widely from the earlier ones we have described. In general, the old alliteration has largely, though not entirely, disappeared; the metres have been simplified; and, the one inheritance remaining from the French courtly lyric, the lover is shown in a submissive attitude. Two groups of lyrics are quite sharply defined—the humorous and convivial songs and the love lyrics. In the manuscripts they jostle each other, and we find beside the eminently decorous and mournful love plaint, “My wofull heart of all gladness barren,” the coarse but vigorous “Be pes, ye make me spill my ale.” There are many such drinking songs, “Tapster, dryer, fille another ale,” or

“ Jentill butler, bellamy,
Fill the boll by the eye;”

to cite merely the opening lines is to describe them. The humorous songs are much closer to life than was the *Man in the Moon*:

- "How hey! it is none lese,
I dare not seyn, whan sche seith 'Pes!'"
- "Ying men, I warne you everichone,
Elde wives tak ye none,
For I myself have one at home.
I dare not seyn, whan sche seith 'Pes!'"
- "If I aske our dame fleich, (meat)
Sche breketh mine hed with a dich;
'Boy, thou art not worth a reich' (rush)
I dare not seyn, whan sche seith 'Pes!'"¹

But even in these uncourtly songs, woman was not always slandered. At the end of a long MS. of curious questions and answers, such as

- "Miht any man, on dry lande well,
Go aboute ye worlde everydele," (every part)

are a few blank pages; one contains the following defense of womankind:

- "I am as lighte as any roe
To preise womene where that I go."
- "To onpreise womene it were a shame,
For a woman was thy dame.
Our blessed lady bereth the name
Of all womene where that they go.
- "A woman is a worthy thing;
They do the washe and do the wringe;
'Lullay, lullay!' she dothe thee singe;
And yet she hath but care and wo.
- "A woman is a worthy wight;
She serveth a man bothe daye and night;
Thereto she putteth alle her might;
And yet she hath but care and wo."²

¹ *Early English Lyrics*, p. 207.

² P. 197.

The love songs have gained a grace, not only in their expression but in their sentiments, as in this madrigal of the middle of the fifteenth century:

“Go hert, hurt with adversite,
And let my lady thi woundes see,
And sey hire this as I say the:
‘Farewel my joy and welcome peyne
Til I se my lady agayne.’”

or in this, from the same MS.:

“Thus I compleyne my grevous hevynesse
To you, that knowith this of myne entent.
Alas, why shuld ye be so merselese,
So moche beute as God hathe you sent.
Ye may my peyne relese,
Do as ye list—I hold me content.”¹

We pass by the famous patriotic song on Agincourt,

“Owre kynge went forth to Normandy,
With grace and myght of chyualry,”

and the popular *Song of the Plow*,

“The plowe gothe mony a gate,
Bothe erly and eke late,
In winter in the clay,
Aboute barly and whete,
That makethe men to swete.
God spede the plowe all day!”²

to come to two important MSS. The first, of one hundred and forty-five pages, contains the words and music of fifty-one two, three, and four part songs, and is considered the

¹ MS. Ashmolean 191. Printed in *Early Bodleian Music*, vol. II, pp. 68, 70.

² Vol. II, pp. 129, 132. The *Song of the Plow* is printed in *Early English Lyrics*, p. 241.

oldest English collection of secular songs written for several voices. It is called the Fairfax MS. because it was once in the possession of Robert Fairfax, a musician and composer of such fame that he was given the degree of Doctor of Music by Cambridge in 1504 and by Oxford in 1511; indeed it is quite possible that he copied it himself, for he eked out his income by writing such music books. Fairfax, who is named as the composer of eight of these songs, died in 1529, yet many of the songs undoubtedly belong to the fifteenth century, for some were written by Turges and Tudor, two musicians of the time of Henry VI, and another composer was Gilbert Bannistre, who died about 1490. The songs are political, religious, amatory; we select two of the last class, the first one, in its simplicity, retaining something of the folk song:

“ My Margarit
 I can not mete
 In feeld ne strete.
 Wofull am I, woffull am I!
 Leve loue this chaunce,
 Yor chere avaunce,
 And let vs daunce.
 Herk my lady, herk my lady,
 So manerly, so manerly, so manerly!”¹

The second song, absolutely different in its style, reads as though it were an attempt to translate an Italian love sonnet, the form imperfectly apprehended:

“ That was my Joy, is now my woo and payne,
 That was my bliss, is now my displesaunce,
 That was my trust, is now my wanhope playne, (despair)
 That was my wele, is now my most grevaunce.
 What causyth this but only yowre plesaunce,
 Onryghtfully shewyng me unkyndness,

¹ E. Flügel, *Neuenglisches Lesebuch*, Bd. I, Halle, 1895, p. 143.

That hath byn your, fayre lady and mastress,
 Nor nought cowde haue—wolde I neuyr so fayne.
 My hart is yours with gret assuraunce,
 Wherefore of rygt ye shuld my greffe complayne,
 And with pite haue me In remembraunce.
 Wolde In no wise, for Joy nor heuyness,
 Haue but yourselfe, fayre lady and mastress.”¹

The second MS. contains ninety-eight part songs, written from the time of Edward IV to Henry VIII. Many of them are composed in a high and courtly mood,

“ Absense of yeu causeth me to sygh and complayne,
 Ffor of my hert ye haue the gouernavnce,
 And thogh I wolde, I kovde me not refrayne,”

but we have carols, drinking songs, and moral ditties. The future course of the lyric is better indicated by this fresh and simple love song:

“ Fayr and discrete, fresche wommanly figure,
 That with youre beute and fresche pleasaunce pure,
 Arested hathe my hert in sodeyn wise,
 I recomende my symple seruice sure,
 My lyues ladi and my hertis cure,
 Vnly to youre swete grace, a thousand sythe. (times)
 Besechyng yeure excuse there I surprise;
 Sum loue commaunds me this auenture,
 Thorffe (?) with your bevy that I most loue and prise.”²

The songs of the fifteenth century have not yet come to their own; many are lying undiscovered on the margins or on the

¹ British Museum, MS., *Add.* 5465, printed by B. Fehr in *Archiv*, CVI, p. 57. A line seems to be omitted after verse seven. *Early English Lyrics* prints six other songs from this MS.

² MS. *Add.* 5665, printed by Fehr in *Archiv*, CVI, pp. 279, 280.

last pages of forgotten manuscripts, but they deserve recognition, and without them we can not adequately estimate the work of Wyatt and Surrey.

VI

We now approach the last conspicuous writer before the Renaissance of the English lyric. John Skelton (1460-1529) studied at Cambridge and was given a degree for achievement in letters—it was called the laureateship—by both his Alma Mater and by Oxford. His honors did not end there, for his widely recognized scholarship caused Henry VII to select him as the tutor of his son, the future Henry VIII, and to bestow on him in recognition of his poetic ability a white and green robe with “Calliope” embroidered on it. Surely here is the English Petrarch. Despite these dignities, Skelton’s life was a stormy one; after many quarrels at court, duly and dully chronicled in verse, he retired to a country parsonage from whose shelter he courageously attacked the luxury and arrogance of Wolsey. Finding his life endangered by his biting satire of the prelate, he fled for refuge to a monastery at Westminster, where he died. His fame was great. Caxton praised his translations from the Latin because they were written “not in rude and old language, but in polished and ornate terms, craftily”; Erasmus, ever a keen critic, described him as “the sole light and glory of English letters”; in Italy, Pico da Mirandola sang his praises.

We open his works to find Mediævalism; they contain hardly a touch of Renaissance art and grace, of the *dolce stil nuovo*. Skelton possessed a keen, alert, and vigorous mind, yet he could not comprehend the new spirit. One of the greatest egoists in our literature (there are some thousand lines of self-adulation in his *Garland of Laurel*) he is

content with himself; he has nothing to learn from the new lyric verse of Italy or France which he must have known, at least in part. At a time when men were feeling the charm of a new manner of poetic expression, Skelton is content to write:

“For though my ryme be ragged,
Tattered and jagged,
Rudely rayne beaten,
Rusty and moughte eaten,
If ye take well therewith,
It hath in it some pyth.”¹

A few lines are sufficient to show his position so far as the art of poetry is concerned; it is significant that the chief field for study in his works is his language, extravagant, grotesque, and often drawn from the slang of the day. Could he have understood the significance of Petrarch (whom he calls a “famous clark” in the *Garland of Laurel*), Skelton’s strong personality would have made him at once a leader; the honor of ushering in the modern English lyric would have been his. English song lacked art and higher themes, but Skelton offers us burlesques, personal controversy of the rough and tumble sort, and a coarse, realistic humor. Pope, with his love of finish, stigmatized the poet as “beastly Skelton,” an undeserved taunt, for he possessed a genuine lyric gift; Taine, in his too unfavorable criticism, does not recognize this.

Skelton’s formal lyric is lifeless; we derive no pleasure from his elegies on Edward IV or the Duke of Northumberland, or from such a love poem as *Go, piteous sighs*. To see him in a thoroughly characteristic mood we must read *Mannerly Margery*:

¹ A. Dyce, *The Poetical Works of John Skelton*, London, 1843, vol. I, p. 313.

" Ay, besherewe yow, be my fay,
 This wanton clarkes be nyse all way;
 Avent, avent, my popagay!
 What, will ye do no thyng but play?
 Tully, valy, strawe, let be, I say!
 Gup, Cristian Clowte, gup, Jak of the vale!
 With, Manerly Margery Mylk and Ale."¹

It is small wonder that this spirited piece was set to music in song collections of the period. Another piece of realism, *My darlyng dere*, is a veritable *chanson des Gueux*, resembling a tavern scene by Jan Steen, in which we see the reveller in his drunken sleep, robbed by his paramour:

" 'My darlyng dere, my daysy floure,
 Let me,' quod he, 'ly in your lap.'
 'Ly styll,' quod she, 'my paramoure,
 Ly styll hardely, and take a nap.'
 Hys hed was heuy, such was his hap,
 All drowsy dremyng, dround in slepe,
 That of hys loue he toke no kepe,
 With, Hey, lullay, lullay, lyke a chylde,
 Thou slepyst to long, thou art begylde."²

Yet Skelton could write with grace and delicacy:

" Enuwyd your colowre (renewed)
 Is lyke the dasy flowre
 After the Aprill showre.

" Sterre of the morow gray, (star)
 The blossom on the spray,
 The fresshest flowre of May,"

is his lyric description of Mistress Isabel Pennell, while a greeting to Mistress Margaret Hussey ends with this tuneful compliment:

¹ Vol. I, p. 28.

² P. 22.

“Stedfast of thought,
Wele made, wele wrought;
Far may be sought
Erst that ye can fynde
So corteise, so kynde
As mirry Magarete,
This midsomer flowre,
Jentyll as fawcoun
Or hawke of the towre.”

His touch can be light and delicate:

“With margerain jentyll, (marjoram)
The flowre of goodlyhede,
Embrowdred the mantill
Is of your maydenhede.
Plainly I can not glose;
Ye be, as I deuyne,
The praty primerose,
The goodly columbyne.”¹

Unfortunately such moments are rare. Skelton had no part in the development of the lyric for he could not read the signs of the times, and though we remember him for a few lyrics, he serves chiefly to show how great were the poetic reforms introduced by Wyatt and Surrey. There is a significant passage concerning him in a letter of James Howell's: "Touching your Poet-Laureat Skelton, I found him at last (as I told you before) skulking in Duck-lane pitifully tattered and torn; and, as the times are, I do not think it worth the labour and cost to put him in better clothes, for the Genius of the Age is quite another thing."²

We have now reached the dawn of the Renaissance in England. We pause for a moment to look back upon the early

¹ Pp. 401, 402, 398.

² J. Jacobs, *The Familiar Letters of James Howell*, London, 1892, vol. II, p. 605.

love songs, the hymns and carols, the lyrics of the guild plays and of the Court. Interesting and beautiful many of them are, yet added to their intrinsic worth is their promise of greater things. The Renaissance spirit had not yet awakened England. Italy had already produced the lyrics of Guido Cavalcanti, of Dante, of Petrarch, to mention but three great names. A single glance in Eugenia Levi's *Lirica Italiana* at the long list of poets who flourished from 1250 to 1500, the very period we have been studying, will show by comparison how retarded was the lyric impulse in England. Across the channel, France with troubadours and trouvères, with the great body of popular verse, with Villon and Charles d'Orléans, had a memorable lyric poetry. Turning to England we are tempted to exclaim

"Alas! what poverty my Muse brings forth,"

but the impulse, the genius for song was there awaiting a new spirit to transform it. The Middle Ages had produced in England poems of a rare and simple pathos; exquisite pictures of the Virgin mother; songs of pure joy that once known are never forgotten. Judged by no historical or antiquarian standards but simply as works of art, as an expression of life, they deserve a wider recognition, not as a field for scholarly investigation but as a source of enjoyment for the plain lover of poetry. From another viewpoint they are valuable: they enable us to appreciate the lyrics of our own day. To turn from the modern lyric with its ever varying moods, its pessimism, its aspiration, its subtle analysis of feeling, its delicate coloring, its elusive music, to these simple, straightforward songs, redolent of spring, suffused with a sincere and childlike devotion for the "maiden moder milde" and for Alysoun, is to realize in the most striking manner the endless complexity and the unfathomed depths of our modern thought and feeling.

CHAPTER THREE

THE TUDOR LYRIC

I

All his life Petrarch (1304-1374) ardently desired fame. Though genius is generally neglected and often persecuted, he attained, in realization of his wishes, honors which few men have ever reached. The nobles of Italy vied in praising this scholar poet; they prepared for him sumptuous apartments hung with purple; they placed him at their tables at high feasts; they entrusted to him princely embassies; and when in 1341, amid the clangor of trumpets and the applause of Rome, the laurel crown was placed on his head, it was but a more public manifestation of the honors continually bestowed upon him. It would seem glory enough for one man to have overthrown the scholasticism of the Middle Ages, to have led in the revival of learning, to have changed the intellectual attitude of Europe, but there was yet another triumph in store for him—to give to the world a new lyric poetry.

A note in Petrarch's own hand on the margin of his Virgil tells us that on Good Friday, 1327 he first saw Laura in the church of Santa Chiara at Avignon. From that moment, she ruled his life:

"Dico che, perch' io miri
Mille cose diverse attento e fiso,
Sol una donna veggio e'l suo bel viso."

"I say that though I regard
A thousand different things, attentively and fixedly,
I see only a woman and her lovely face."¹

¹ From the canzone "In quella parte."

Who Laura was, we cannot tell with certainty, and since Petrarch himself wished to hide her identity, it is enough to say that she was a woman whose beauty inspired in this youth of twenty-three a love, or rather a cult, which her death in 1348 but intensified and to which he consecrated not "a night of memories and of sighs" but a whole lifetime. The poetry that sprang from this love was based not on outward events but on inward experiences; it was a lyric that sang not of action but of contemplation. As a wit once compressed into a dozen couplets the events of Richardson's long-drawn-out romance, *Sir Charles Grandison*, so (but in no spirit of irreverence) the actual happenings of the *Canzoniere* may be told in a few quatrains. The sonnets offer us but detached incidents—Laura wears a veil, she smiles, she weeps, she sees the poet, she gathers flowers, she bathes in a stream—and it is extremely doubtful whether we should interpret literally the few references to what are apparently actual events. There is no development in such a passion; the poet's love has undergone no essential change from the moment he first saw Laura until the day of her death, for, as De Sanctis observes, Petrarch has written but the first page of a romance—the plot is lacking. Never was such splendid lyric poetry based on so slender a foundation of actual occurrences.¹ The most subjective lyric may be closely connected with the manifestations of the outer world, springing directly from the poet's thoughts on the life that passes before him. In Browning's *Last Ride Together* how much of the world we see; but the greater number of Petrarch's love lyrics spring from introspection, for he fed

"on thoughts that voluntary move
Harmonious numbers."

¹ Cf. G. Finze, *Petrarca*, Firenze, 1900, pp. 97 ff.

It is accordingly a just criticism that compares the lyrics of Petrarch to a diary in which he has written, for fifty years, his thoughts on love precisely as they came to him. Hence to seek in his sonnets for a sequence of events, or to attempt to arrange them in a definite, logical order except in such broad divisions as sonnets on the beauty of Laura, on the power of his love for her, on his unhappiness, on her death, is to misunderstand totally the spirit in which these verses were composed.

In his subtle yet eminently sane analysis of the *Canzoniere*, De Sanctis admits that Petrarch, with all his exquisite sensibility, with his clear and penetrating mind, lacked originality, profundity, and productive force; accordingly we find in this modern poet much of the old school. The starting point of the *Canzoniere* is in the poetry of the troubadours which Petrarch knew thoroughly and from which he borrowed not only ideas, but at times the very phrases in which they were expressed; hence all we have written concerning these early singers applies to a certain part of Petrarch's lyrics. Thus Love, a mystic power springing from a single glance from Laura's eyes, entered the poet's heart "Con la virtù d'un subito splendore," as he expressed it in a noble line. Henceforth the poet is the servant of Laura and the vassal of the cruel tyrant, Love, who appears in so many debates that we may say there are three characters in the tragedy of the *Canzoniere*—Laura, Petrarch, and Amor.

Leaving the inheritance from the past, we discover in the sonnets much that is new. We must content ourselves with alluding to but three great characteristics of Petrarch's lyrics: his analysis of feeling, his love of beauty, and the music of his verse.

Petrarch by nature was given to melancholy:

"Ed io son un di quei che'l pianger giova"

he wrote and in many passages he praises sorrow:

“Pasco'l cor di sospir', ch'altro non chiede;
 E di lagrime vivo, a pianger nato:
 Nè di ciò duolmi; perchè in tale stato
 E dolce il pianto più ch'altri non crede.”¹

“I feed with sighs my heart that asks nothing more;
 And I live on tears, born to weep;
 Nor do I grieve at this for in such a state
 Weeping is sweeter than any one believes.”

He delighted to dream in solitude on his unhappy state and this native melancholy, this disposition of his mind to retire within itself, was intensified by a love placed on a woman forever beyond him. [The more he thinks of Laura, the more he idealizes her until she becomes the epitome of all virtues, an angel but new descended from the skies.] It is not surprising that in 1336 Giacomo Colonna wrote to the poet suggesting that such a love was a fiction, an allegory, and that Petrarch was enamoured of the poetic Laurel, not Laura. We do not need Petrarch's reply to convince us that however much of Platonic idealization entered into his picture of Laura, she was a woman of flesh and blood who inspired not intellectual admiration but love. From Petrarch's character, this love does not burst forth in the simple, moving accents that invariably mark the speech of a man stirred by a great passion; there is more of the lyric cry in the songs of many a lesser poet. Certain passages in the *Canzoniere* contradict this statement; we must except, for example, that masterpiece, the sonnet which describes Laura meeting the poet in the third heaven, the sphere of Venus, or those famous lines in the sestina which begins “A qualunque animale alberga in terra”:

“Con lei foss' io da che si parte il sole,
 E non ci vedess' altri che le stelle,
 Sol una notte! e mai non fosse l'alba.”

¹ From the sonnet beginning “Poichè 'l cammin m'è chiuso di mercede.”

“ With her would I be, when the sun sets,
And would that no one save the stars saw us,
One night alone! and would it were never dawn!”

but such moments are rare, and in the very next line of the *sestina* the poet descends to the trivialities of allegory and mythology and plays upon the words *Laura* and *lauro*. Petrarch is swayed by emotions rather than by passions; the sonnets are the anatomy of a lover's melancholy, and De Sanctis rightly points out the resemblance between Petrarch and Hamlet. Both show the same hesitation, the same love of thinking too precisely on the event, the same enjoyment in a self-analysis that ends in melancholy. The strong nature, swayed by great affections, finds relief in action, while the more sensitive spirit gains satisfaction in the contemplation of its own sorrows.¹ Emotion, incapable of action, becomes melancholy and in Petrarch, even before the death of Laura, the prevailing note is one of sadness; the poet writes more beautifully of Laura when he sees her with the eyes of memory or of the spirit than when he actually beholds her.

This sadness, then, is caused as much by the poet's irresolution as by his unhappy love. He will neither shun nor accept his fate; like Hamlet, he meditates self-slaughter but fears the Almighty's canon against it. We see a soul tossed hither and thither by conflicting emotion; he curses the time he first saw Laura, and in another mood he blesses the place, the day, the moment that brought him this love. He tells us that this love has ennobled him and that it leads him to heaven; he protests that it has ruined him by causing him to consume his days in vanity. It would be a simple matter to accumulate any number of such inconsistencies—and it must not be forgotten that the sonnets cover a long

¹ F. De Sanctis, *Saggio critico sul Petrarca, nuova edizione a cura di B. Croce*, Napoli, 1907, p. 138.

period—for the mind of Petrarch is constantly wavering. Throughout the sonnets there is but one consistent note—his love for Laura. In vain he struggles to forget and even to despise it. His irresolution is as tragic as the death of Laura; he can show others the way to happiness but he can not follow it himself. “Father in Heaven,” he cries, “after so many days and nights spent in vain pursuits, let me turn to a higher life and to nobler undertakings,” but the prayer is never answered. When, far from Laura, he resolves to banish her from his mind and take refuge in a religious life, the single thought that he has tarried too long sends him back to her.¹ The motto of the *Canzoniere* might well be Daniel’s verse, “Love is a sickness full of woes.”

To this self-analysis, astonishingly modern in its complexity and in its suggestiveness, Petrarch added the charm of artistic expression, for he sought to picture the beauty of the world, the charm and loveliness of womanhood. A thorough Platonist, he considered beauty to be an expression of divinity, another form of virtue, and therefore to be sought out and worshipped. Laura embodies every perfection and in contemplating her, the mind rises to heaven and beholds the Creator. Writing in such a spirit, Petrarch is everywhere the artist. All through the *Canzoniere* he has scattered pictures, often as small as the miniatures of a missal, full of color, drawn to the life, whether he brings before us in a few phrases the woods and the song of the birds at evening, or an aged pilgrim, worn and bent, journeying painfully to the distant shrine. He realized that in the short sonnet form every word, each syllable, must count for its effect and therefore every line is carefully wrought; yet in the finished expression we do not feel the labor of the artist and many of the quatorzains read as though they were improvisations. If we turn to the masterpiece of the

¹See the sonnet “L’aspetto sacro.”

Canzoniere, "Chiare, fresche e dolci acque," we find all the traits we have been discussing. We have the poet's melancholy as he thinks of Laura and dreams that some day she may sigh and weep above his grave; we have that wonderful memory picture, worthy of the highest art of Botticelli—Laura seated on the grass, the Queen of Love, while around her and upon her the trees shower their blossoms.

This psychological analysis, this descriptive art is expressed with a verbal music in itself sufficient to make the sonnets immortal. As De Musset wrote:

" Lui seul eut le secret de saisir au passage
Les battements du cœur qui durent un moment;
Et, riche d'un sourire, il en gravait l'image
Du bout d'un stylet d'or sur un pur diamant."¹

It is extremely doubtful whether we can ever grasp the full content of poetry written in a foreign tongue; while we may understand the essential meaning, we miss the fine shadings, the subtle associations of words that are not our own. What Italian can appreciate the immeasurable loss had Coleridge written not "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," but "The Poem of the Old Sailor"; yet the melody, the harmony, the enchantment of Petrarch's verse must appeal to every one. The sonnets were actually songs; some were composed to the lute ("Perchè, cantando, il duol si disacerba"), and in his own day his contemporaries set them to music. In the sixteenth century, the greater part of the *Canzoniere*—ballate, sestine, canzoni—were given a musical accompaniment by the most famous composers. When Serafino dell' Aquila went through Italy chanting Petrarch's verses, we may easily believe the statement that "to hear him sing them to the lute, was to hear every other harmony surpassed."²

¹ *Le Fils du Titien*.

² F. Flamini, *Varia*, Livorno, 1905, p. 179.

Petrarch frequently expressed the hope that death would not destroy his fame, that for centuries his sorrows would still bring tears to the eyes, and even his ambition would have been satisfied, possibly dismayed, could he have foreseen the effect the *Canzoniere* was to produce. To the lyrists who came after his day, there was but one poet; in the sixteenth century but thirty editions of Dante were published in Italy, while in this same period one hundred and seventy-seven editions of the *Canzoniere* appeared. It is not too much to say that no poet in the world was ever so widely, so slavishly imitated. For more than two centuries, Petrarch ruled the lyric of the Renaissance as Aristotle had swayed the thought of the Middle Ages, and the same superstitious veneration was paid to him. The house at Arquà in which he died became a shrine and the relics of the poet preserved there were gazed upon with a reverence that, to modern eyes, appears ridiculous.¹

In one of the sonnets to his friend, Shakespeare asserts in a splendid phrase, "My spirit is thine, the better part of me"; unfortunately the spirit of Petrarch did not descend upon his followers. His love for Laura had lasted half a century and there were of necessity many times when he wrote, not because he was a lover, but because he loved to write. In such uninspired moments he delighted in personifications, in allegories that seemed subtle to his followers but which to us are the essence of false wit; he took pleasure in stringing together what seemed to him ingenious antitheses and paradoxes; and he even descended to play upon words, to puns on Laura, lauro, l'aura! If it is true that Homer occasionally nods, it is equally certain that Petrarch at times falls into a sound slumber. This essentially false style arises from an attempt to elevate by sheer force of ingenuity situations that do not deserve poetic treatment, or thoughts that are

¹ A. Graf, *Attraverso il Cinquecento*, Torino, 1888, pp. 39-44.

so trivial that there is no reason for expressing them. Petrarch tells us in the sonnet beginning "Del mar Tirreno alla sinistra riva," that while walking alone he fell into a brook which the tall grass had hidden. If such an episode is to be treated at all in verse, it should be in the spirit of comedy; Petrarch approaches it with high seriousness. "At last," he observes, "I have changed my style. Formerly my eyes were bathed in tears for Laura—now my feet are wet." There is so much of this essentially insincere work in the *Canzoniere* that there is need of separating the good from the banal, as Matthew Arnold did with Wordsworth's poetry. \This discrimination the followers of Petrarch could not exercise; they could not take the gold and leave the alloy, and as nothing is easier than to collect antitheses, or to invent allegories, or to talk vaguely of ideal beauty, they chose to imitate the poorer part of his work. |Genius is inimitable but unfortunately the mannerisms and the weaknesses of genius may be copied; hence it is that for two centuries the Italian lyrists, feigning a hopeless love, a lofty Platonic adoration of beauty, repeated in borrowed accents Petrarch's praise of Laura, his lamentations over her cruelty, his longing for death. The virtue of the Petrarchists was a certain grace of expression, for even the feeblest imitator had his musical moments; their vice was the deadliest of all poetic vices—insincerity. They produced literally hundreds of sonnets crying out on the woes of life and invoking death, but the sixteen lines of Leopardi's *A se stesso* have more truth than all their quatorzains put together.

The followers of Petrarch were a mighty legion. No one has ever presumed to read and appraise their interminable sonnet sequences; Vaganay's compendious survey of the field is not a complete one.¹ The smallest towns had their sonneteers. Apparently in the sixteenth century every

¹ H. Vaganay, *Le Sonnet en Italie et en France au XVI^e siècle*, Lyon, 1903. Cf. Flamini, *Il Cinquecento*, Milano, p. 203.

Italian pretending to culture composed sonnets, even though he did not publish them, and unfortunately to do this was no more an indication of poetic ability than a college degree to-day is a proof of refinement. In 1546 and 1547 Domenichi brought out two volumes of *Rime Diverse di molti eccellentissimi auttori*, a collection completed in nine volumes in 1560; in these first two, there were represented one hundred and thirty-seven authors who contributed some nine hundred and fifty sonnets, and this was but one of many anthologies. The ease with which sixteenth century sonnet collections may be purchased in Italy strikingly indicates in what vast quantities they were issued from the press.

Side by side with the sonnets there were published a large number of essays and dialogues on the nature of love. Bembo's *Asolani* (1505), reprinted again and again, inspired a whole literature and we have Plato's conception of love, as expounded in the *Phædrus* and the *Symposium* and modified by the teaching of the early Church fathers, repeated in essays, dialogues, lectures, commentaries on poems, familiar letters, until we wonder how readers could be found for them. The one idea on which they ring the changes is that the contemplation of earthly beauty raises us to a vision of heavenly perfection, hence love is the golden stair from the earth to the skies. This doctrine, unfolded at times with real learning but more often with officious pedantry, supported by copious citations from the classics and from the writings of the Church, sanctioned with the utmost gravity that delight which the age took in Petrarch's sonnets. Frequently these treatises cite Petrarch as the past master of love and, without the slightest doubt, they increased the vogue of his school. But this lofty conception of love as a veritable means of grace, this high conception of the mission of beauty, was in reality as insincere and as remote from the real beliefs of the age as were the lamentations of the Petrarchists. A single illustration of this must suffice, though many could

be given. Tullia of Aragon, famous for her amours, published her dialogue *Dell' infinità d'Amore* in 1547, the very year the authorities of Florence took action against her for not wearing the head-dress prescribed by law for courtesans. The more the love literature of the sixteenth century, both prose and verse, is studied, the greater appears its conventionality.

The Petrarchian school of poetry was not confined to its own home. François I, a lover of art and poetry, had been captivated by the beauty and the splendor of the South. His victory at Marignano is more important for the history of culture than for its political consequences; and under this king, "the father of letters," France became an artistic and literary province of Italy. He brought to his own country the art and poetry he had enjoyed under Italian skies; and a veritable band of Tuscan artists and poets came to Fontainebleau and Paris where they found in the king the most generous of patrons. Fontainebleau became a magnificent Italian palace for which, in the words of Varchi, Batista della Palla had "robbed Florence of as many statues and paintings as he could," and it is not surprising that a king who had brought to France Benvenuto Cellini and Andrea del Sarto, "delighted marvelously in them." Italian became the court language, and the king and his sister, who knew it perfectly, wished to place it on an equality with their own tongue; in his memoirs Cellini frequently notes that this or that French nobleman spoke Italian "benissimo."¹

In this atmosphere the verses of Petrarch and his followers were read and imitated; in literary circles at least, the lamentations over Laura were as well known on the banks of the Seine as on the Arno. Nor did this predilection for Italian literature content itself with reading the works

¹ See F. Flamini, *Studi di Storia Letteraria Italiana e Straniera*, Livorno, 1895, pp. 199-337; *Varia*, pp. 193-217.

of former poets; for Luigi Alamanni and other Italian writers composed and published their sonnets and canzoni on French soil. Naturally this admiration for Italian verse is reflected in the writings of the French poets; to take two such different natures as Clément Marot and Melin de Saint-Gelais, we find them both imitating or translating the most famous of the Italians, Petrarch and Serafino, Tebaldeo and Sannazzaro. To come under the spell of Italian culture, to be inspired by its art and poetry, Englishmen needed to cross not the Alps but the Channel.

II

We have dwelt on the Italian school because of its influence on the English lyric, both directly and through the medium of the French. This subject deserves the most extended treatment, for it offers the student of comparative literature a fascinating field only partially surveyed; but before we consider the foreign element in English song, we must glance for a moment at the continuation of the native lyric tradition.

The reign of Henry VIII opened so auspiciously that Erasmus believed the Golden Age had returned. In the universities the new learning flourished; at the court several poets and a small band of composers enjoyed the king's favor (for he was himself a writer and a musician), and aroused the artistic consciousness of the higher classes. Erasmus, a keen judge, notes that the English were the most musical nation, a testimony confirmed by other foreigners. Particularly in courtly circles was musical accomplishment prized; the choir of the royal chapel was renowned far and wide. The king's musical efforts are not highly regarded to-day; of his poetry we can at least say that he was never destined for the laurel, and in all his many alliances, never wedded to the Muse.

" Pastime with good company
I love and shall, until I die.
Grudge who lust, but none deny.
So God be pleased, thus live will I.
For my pastance,
Hunt, sing and dance,
My heart is set.
All goodly sport
For my comfort
Who shall me let?"¹

he writes, or in a more sentimental strain in which he should be a master

" Do way, dear heart, not so!
Let no thought you dismay.
Though ye now part me fro,
We shall meet when we may.

" When I remember me
Of your most gentle mind,
It may in no wise agree
That I should be unkind.

" The daisy delectable,
The violet wan and blo, (pale)
Ye are not variable.
I love you and no moc."²

It must have been difficult, even for a courtier, to discover inspiration in these lines, but they are interesting because they show the king setting a fashion in lyrical composition and we are not surprised to find the manuscript collections of lyrics becoming more and more numerous.

¹ *Early English Lyrics*, p. 212. Cf. E. Flügel, *Neuenglisches Lesebuch*, p. 146. This book contains an excellent selection of lyrics of this period. This, and the following song, are printed in modern notation in Vincent Jackson's *English Melodies from the 13th to the 18th Century*, London, 1910, pp. 17, 18.

² *Early English Lyrics*, p. 55.

In general the language of these lyrics is more refined than that of the songs of the previous century, yet we have the same simplicity of thought and emotion and we find the same ideas constantly repeated. A few examples must suffice:

- “ ‘Come over the woodes fair and green,
 Thou goodly maid, thou lusty wench,
 To shadow you from the sunne sheen.
 Under the wood there is a bench.’
 ‘Sir, I pray you, do none offence
 To me, a maid, this I make my moan,
 But as I came let me go hence,
 For I am here myself alone.’
- “ ‘The custom and the manner here
 Of maidens is, and ever was,
 That gather the flowers without a fere, (companion)
 To pay a trepitt, or they pass.’ (fine)
 ‘Then of my mouth come take a bass; (kiss)
 For other goodes have I none
 But flowers fair among the grass
 Which I have gathered all alone.’ ”

Here we have a duo between the lover and his lass as in the early Harleian MS. 2253. The songs in praise of May and the spring are as popular as ever:

- “ Awake therefore, young men,
 All ye that lovers be, hey ho!
 This month of May,
 So fresh, so gay,
 So fair be fields on fen;
 Hath flourish ilk again.
 Great joy it is to see, hey ho!
 Then dyry come dawn, dyry come dyry, come dyry!
 Come dyry, come dyry, come dawn, hey ho!”¹

¹ Pp. 64, 71.

Many of the early sixteenth century love songs are absolutely charming:

“ My heart, my mind, and my whole power,
My service true with all my might,
On land or sea, in storm or shower,
I give to you be day and night,
And eke my body for to fight.
My goods also be at your pleasure,
Take me and mine as your own treasure.”¹

The following ditty is a typical one, well fitted for music:

“ My heart is yours, now keep it fast,
Without your favour, my joy is past;
I will not change while my life do last,
I promise you, I promise you.

“ I joy in that I have your grace,
I moan when pity lacks his place,
Thus resteth all in your sweet face,
I promise you.

“ You are my wealth, I am your woe,
I think on you where ever I go,
I love you heartily and no mo,
I promise you.”

The songs in praise of beauty are innumerable and not all of them portray a hopeless love:

“ To laugh, to smile, to sport, to play,
I will not let the truth to say,
And be as jocund as the jay,
For aye, for aye.

¹ From *Bassus*, a book of twenty songs, printed in 1530 by Wynkyn de Worde. As the name indicates, it contains merely the music for the bass. It has been reprinted in *Anglia*, XII, pp. 389 ff.

“ My heart is locked within a chest,
In keeping with her whom I love best,
It may be glad to have such rest,
And there to lie, to lie.

“ Her face so sweet for to behold,
Her hair as bright as the wire gold,
Another thing there should be told,
Her yee, her yee.

“ Which twinkleth clear as the diamond pure,
And hath welcomed me to the lure,
To serve her still while life doth endure,
Will I, will I.”

The lilt of the following song is irresistible :

“ My little pretty one, my pretty bonnie one,
She is a joyous one, and as gentle as can be;
With a beck she comes anon,
With a wink she will be gone,
No doubt she is a love of all that ever I see.”

The refrain becomes more and more a feature :

“ Of beauty yet she passeth all,
Which hath mine heart and ever shall,
To live or die what so befall,
What would she more, what would she more.

“ She is so fixed in my heart
That for her sake I bide great smart,
Yet can not I my love depart,
What would she more, what would she more.

“ Long have I lived in great distress,
Long have I sought to have redress,
Long hath she been mine own mistress,
What would she more, what would she more.”¹

¹ From *Additional MS.* 18752. I have reprinted the songs in this MS. in *Anglia* XXXIII, pp. 344-367.

It is indeed difficult to make selections from the anonymous lyrics of the early sixteenth century because there is such a large body of them, and an interesting anthology could be made of the songs of this period alone. Without the slightest doubt much remains to be discovered and published; but whatever new manuscripts may be brought to light, it seems safe to predict that the poems they contain will be composed in a few simple metres, with no attempt at a heightened or even polished diction, expressing in a direct and simple manner the joys of Spring, the praise of beauty, or the complaints of despised love.

The lyrical element in the Moralities and Interludes of the age is prominent, as it was in the Mysteries. As we find in the love songs the earlier traditions of simple emotions untouched by imagination, so in the dramatic entertainments the songs continue the themes of the former age. Unfortunately many of them are not included in the printed texts which contain, however, frequent references to the lyrics, written for one voice or for several. Thus in *The Four P's*, printed about 1540, the Potheary asks the Pedlar "I pray you tell me, can you sing?" to which he replies, "Sir, I have some sight in singing," and after some further conversation with the Palmer and Pardoner on the subject of their musical ability, the Potheary exclaims, "Who that list, sing after me," but the song is not given.¹ The ones that have been preserved do not compare with the songs in the manuscript collections, for the dramatic lyric developed more slowly, as we may easily see by examining the songs in Dodsley's *Old English Plays*, for example; nevertheless they are deserving of study because they lead directly to the songs of the Elizabethan dramatists.

The most popular song in these early plays appears to be

¹ W. C. Hazlitt-R. Dodsley, *A Select Collection of Old English Plays*, 4th ed, London, 1874, vol. I, p. 353.

the drinking song. Sensual Appetite sings one in the interlude of the *Four Elements* (cir. 1518):

“ Make rome, syrs, and let us be mery,
 With huffa galand, synge tyrll on the bery,
 And let the wyde worlde wynde!
 Synge fryska joly, with hey troly loly,
 For I se wel it is but a foly
 For to have a sad mynd:”¹

Dissimulation, in Bale’s *King John* (1550?), has this boisterous tavern ditty:

“ Wassayle, wassayle, out of the mylke payle,
 Wassayle, wassayle, as whyte as my nayle,
 Wassalye, wassayle, in snowe froste and hayle,
 Wassayle, wassayle, with partriche and rayle,
 Wassayle, wassayle, that mucche doth avale,
 Wassayle, wassayle, that never wyll fale.”²

We come to the reign of Elizabeth in *Fulwell’s Like will to Like* (printed 1563), which has seven songs, of which “Good hostess, lay a crab in the fire” is the continuation of the roistering theme:

“ And I will pledge Tom Toss-pot,
 Till I be drunk as a mouse-a:
 Whoso will drink to me all day,
 I will pledge them all carouse-a.”³

In Elizabeth’s reign these songs culminate in the famous toper’s song in *Gammer Gurton’s Needle* (1575), which is

¹ Pollard, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

² P. 150.

³ Hazlitt-Dodsley, vol. III, p. 339.

perhaps the finest example of these roistering ditties; certainly no other song has a more rollicking swing:

“ Back and side go bare, go bare,
Both foot and hand go cold:
But, belly, God send thee good ale enough,
Whether it be new or old.

“ I love no roast but a nut-brown toast,
And a crab laid in the fire.
A little bread shall do me stead,
Much bread I not desire.
No frost nor snow, no wind, I trow,
Can hurt me if I would;
I am so wrapt, and thoroughly lapt,
Of jolly good ale and old.”¹

Lusty Juventus (cir. 1550) contains two songs, in a simple metre; they are the most poetical ones to be found in all these early interludes. The first is sung by Youth:

“ In a herber green, asleep where as I lay,
The birds sang sweet in the middes of the day;
I dreamed fast of mirth and play:
In youth is pleasure, in youth is pleasure.”

The other is sung by Hypocrisy and Abominable Living:

“ Do not the flowers spring fresh and gay,
Pleasant and sweet in the month of May?
And when their time cometh they fade away.
Report me to you, report me to you.”²

These are not masterpieces. The dramatic lyric had not felt the breath of the new poetry, and it awaited the Eliza-

¹ P. 189.

² Vol. II, pp. 46, 89.

bethans to make it one of the crowning beauties of our literature.

III

The new impulse in the English lyric came from the songs of Wyatt and Surrey. In his *Arte of English Poesie* (1589), George Puttenham wrote: "In the latter end of the same King's [Henry the Eighth] raigne sprong up a new company of courtly makers, of whom Sir Thomas Wyat th'elder and Henry Earle of Surrey were the two chieftanes, who having travailed into Italie, and there tasted the swete and stately measures and stile of the Italian Poesie as novices newly crept out of the schools of Dante, Arioste and Petrarch, they greatly polished our rude and homely maner of vulgar Poesie, from that it had been before, and for that cause may justly be sayd the first reformers of our English meetre and stile." This statement of the Elizabethan critic modern scholarship confirms and even emphasizes more strongly.

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) was a graduate of Cambridge, an excellent linguist well versed in French, Italian, and Spanish, and a skilled musician. Not only was he representative of all that was best in the culture of the age, but he was a man of force and action, as we may see from the vigorous speech by which he freed himself from the generally fatal charge of treason. It is small wonder that he was selected by the king for important diplomatic missions and that his career was a political one. Poetry was his recreation and solace, for he was not in our modern sense a man of letters; and in estimating his achievement we must remember as well that his life was cut short when he was but thirty-nine. In 1526 he was a member of a diplomatic mission to Paris and it is possible that he met at this time Luigi Alamanni, one of whose satires he imitated in the last years

of his life. Wyatt was attracted by French poetry; several of his poems show unmistakably French influence, and it is probable that he learned from Marot, whose works he knew, the rondeau form. The following year he was sent to Rome and in the course of his travels he visited Venice, Ferrara, Bologna, and Florence, all literary centers. It is not too much to assert that this journey, undertaken for matters of state, changed the history of the English lyric. Wyatt's tastes were literary; he was gifted with a strong poetical temperament; he was devoted to music. When he heard sung under the warm skies of Italy the sonnets of Petrarch and his followers, the strambotti of that brilliant musician and improvisatore, Serafino dell' Aquila, the idol of his time, he discovered a world of music and poetry that differed from his native songs as a Venetian sunrise from the fogs and mists of London.¹ It takes but little imagination to perceive the enthusiasm that the Italian lyric awakened in him and it was inevitable that he should find in its songs the inspiration for his own verse. What Italy has given to the world would be a subject as inexhaustible as the long-drawn-out lamentations of the Petrarchists, but what she gave to Wyatt can be expressed in a sentence or two. The wonderful Italian landscapes, the glories of the Renaissance sculpture, painting, and architecture he does not allude to, for he sought but one thing—the gift of song. He knew that the English lyric was crude and halting in its diction; the Muse stammered when she should sing; and he turned to those verse forms in which the Italians had attained such harmonies—the terza and ottava rima, and above all the sonnet.

The sonnet is the most important, as it is the most perfect, of all modern lyric forms and had Italy done nothing more than to give it to the world, she would have been held in perpetual remembrance. Without attempting to be over-

¹ Flamini, *Varia*, pp. 169-190, has given a brief but vivid account of Serafino.

subtle, we may believe that through some law of sound and harmony the sonnet form exactly satisfies the ear as it does the mind, for it has become almost a universal metre; certainly every nation in Western Europe has employed it. On the other hand, our English blank verse is not poetry to the French ear and the present-day writers who have tried to bring it across the channel have met with no success. To take another example, the Spenserian stanza is distinctly an English metre; but the sonnet is a world form.

The Italians divided its fourteen lines into octave and sestet. In the first eight lines a thought, an emotion, a picture is completely presented and the verse sentence, so to speak, comes to an end; while in the last six lines, the explanation, the comment, the summing up of the whole matter is given. As Watts-Dunton has well expressed it, the sonnet is a wave of melody rising in the octave to sink in the sestet, or receding in the octave, to rise and fall with a crash in the sestet. The wonderful variety, the almost endless effects that have been obtained from the sonnet's fourteen lines are as marvelous, though in a lesser degree, as the music that has sprung from the simple tones of the scale.¹

In literary history, then, Wyatt is famous as the first Englishman to write in the sonnet form, but it is a curious fact that not one of his thirty-two sonnets follows strictly the usual Italian rhyme scheme; his octaves may be correctly written but he ends his sestet with a couplet. Not one of them would be included in a collection of representative English sonnets except to illustrate the history and the development of the form. Though much work yet remains to be done on the sources of his verse, nearly one half of his sonnets have been shown to be adaptations or translations. As a translator he showed little skill, for his versions of Petrarch are both clumsy and crude and the English language

¹ Cf. G. Saintsbury, *A History of English Prosody*, London, 1906, vol. I, pp. 303 ff.

seems to him to be a difficult and unflexible medium of expression. Nothing could be further from Petrarch than the following rendering of "Amor, che nel penser mio vive e regna":

"The long love that in my thought I harbour,
And in my heart doth keep his residence,
Into my face presseth with bold pretence,
And there campeth displaying his banner.
She that me learns to love and to suffer,
And wills that my trust, and lust's negligence
Be reined by reason, shame, and reverence,
With his hardiness takes displeasure.
Wherewith Love to the heart's forest he fleeth,
Leaving his enterprise with pain and cry,
And there him hideth, and not appeareth.
What may I do, when my master feareth,
But in the field with him to live and die?
For good is the life, ending faithfully."¹

This is not Wyatt at his best; such lines are plainly an early attempt at composition, for both the rhythm and the rhyme are strangely defective, yet hardly one of Wyatt's sonnets can be read with much pleasure.² His translations of Petrarch's canzoni are equally unsatisfactory. The one commencing "Quel antiquo mio dolce empio signore" was not composed in Petrarch's inspired moments, but it has his style, and rises and falls melodiously. Wyatt is utterly unable to reproduce this free movement and forces the poem

¹ *The Poetical Works of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, London, Aldine edition, p. 1.

² A much better sonnet is:

"Ye that in love find luck and sweet abundance,
And live in lust of joyful jollity,
Arise for shame, do way your sluggardy:
Arise, I say, do May some observance."

into a new mould, his favorite rhyme royal. The canzone beginning "Sì è debile il filo" has this graceful envoy:

"Canzon, s'al dolce loco
 La donna nostra vedi,
 Credo ben che tu credi
 Ch'ella ti porgerà la bella mano
 Ond' io son sì lontano:
 Non la toccar; ma reverente ai piedi
 Le di' ch' io sarò là tosto ch'io possa,
 O spirto ignudo od uom di carne e d'ossa."

This becomes, under Wyatt's pen:

"My song! thou shalt attain to find that pleasant place,
 Where she doth live by whom I live; may chance to have this
 grace,
 When she hath read, and seen the grief wherein I serve,
 Between her breasts she shall thee put, there shall she thee
 reserve:
 Then tell her that I come, she shall me shortly see,
 And if for weight the body fail, the soul shall to her flee."¹

which is not only poor poetry, but a very poor translation. Wyatt clearly felt the lack of style and finish in the English lyric, for all through his poetry he seems to be experimenting in metres, of which he employs a large number. He has left one hundred and eighty-two lyrics and he has used in them fifteen distinct types of the single line, such as the pentameter, the trimeter, the dimeter, and by various combinations of these lines he has obtained great variety of stanza forms. These essays in metre we may regard as the result of his study of the Italian and the French lyric, for whereas hitherto English song had been satisfied with a few simple stanzas Wyatt wishes a richer mode of expression.

Wyatt's translations are not happy in their subject matter. His admiration for Petrarch is unquestioned; when

¹ See Wyatt's poem beginning "So feeble is the thread," p. 154.

he mourns the death of his friend Cromwell nothing seems to him so fitting as to adapt for the occasion Petrarch's sonnet on the death of Colonna, yet he selects for paraphrase or imitation the poorer part of the *Canzoniere*. The veriest tyro would recognize to-day that in "Chiare, fresche e dolci acque" we have the flower of Petrarch's song, but as we have seen, he passes over this for two much inferior canzoni. The sonnet we have quoted is in Petrarch's worst style, as are two others that Wyatt turned into English, "My galley charged with forgetfulness," a string of conceits, and "I find no peace," a collection of antitheses. It cannot be said that he has selected the best work of Tebaldeo, Giusto de' Conti, Serafino, Sannazzaro; and his subject-matter is most satisfactory when he continues the traditions of English song, employing a surer, a more straightforward style than the elder writers used.

On the whole, Wyatt chose to write of unhappy love. "Sonnets be not bound 'prentice to Annoy," wrote Sir Philip Sidney sententiously, but the Petrarchists thought otherwise and Wyatt followed them, not alone in direct translation, but in the general tone of his verse. His lyrics, almost exclusively on the theme of love, lack what Donne has called "Love's sweetest part—variety." Wyatt himself remarked that his verse had "plenty of plaint, woe and mourning," and the reader tires of "The Lover complaineth," "The Lover lamenteth," "The Lover bemoaneth." Any classification of his poems by their contents is difficult because the same song may express both joy and despair, but from their general tenor, fourteen poems describe his renunciation of love, twenty-one picture the fickleness of womankind, and forty-nine express the pains of love. For the most part we may believe these songs to be mere imitations, conventional expressions, for so many of them lack the ring of sincerity; they do not read as though they came from the poet's life, and therefore Wyatt's poetry, as a whole, fails to impress

itself deeply on the reader's mind. With the exception of certain poems which we shall mention, few of his songs, or even phrases, linger in the memory and he is not one of those writers to whom we return again and again. So far as their æsthetic worth is concerned, it would make no difference whether the best of Shakespeare's sonnets were composed in the sixteenth or the nineteenth century for they are absolute works of art, independent of considerations of age and country; we feel in reading Wyatt that much of his verse is valuable chiefly as illustrating the beginnings of the modern English lyric.

When he is not openly translating or imitating foreign verse, his style is plain and unadorned. He uses few similes, few adjectives of color; there is little pictorial quality in his work, for he did not have the power to bring before the reader in a vivid line, a garden, or a sunset, or to show us, in a single phrase, a whole landscape. The picture in the following stanza is so unusual in his writings that I suspect it to be a translation:

“Thanked be Fortune, it hath been otherwise
Twenty times better; but once especial,
In thin array, after a pleasant guise,
When her loose gown did from her shoulders fall,
And she me caught in her arms long and small,
And therewithal so sweetly did me kiss,
And softly said ‘Dear heart, how like you this?’”

especially so if we compare it with the following description from a poem which seems to be original:

“She wept and wrung her hands withal,
The tears fell in my neck:
She turned her face, and let it fall;
And scarce therewith could speak:
Alas! the while!”¹

¹ See “They flee from me” and “There was never nothing,” pp. 32, 57.

Wyatt has left a small group of poems worthy of the highest praise. His "My lute, awake" has a grace which he may have learned from the Petrarchists, but a dignity which removes it from their complaints:

"May chance thee lie withered and old
The winter nights, that are so cold,
Plaining in vain unto the moon;
Thy wishes then dare not be told:
Care then who list, for I have done.

"Now cease, my lute! this is the last
Labour, that thou and I shall waste;
And ended is that we begun:
Now is this song both sung and past;
My lute! be still, for I have done."¹

Equally effective, and perfectly adapted for music, is his song:

"And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay! say nay! for shame
To save thee from the blame
Of all my grief and grame. (sorrow)
And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay! say nay!"²

His masterpiece, "Forget not yet," is one of the finest lyrics in our language, the simple and direct expression of a great passion. The reader accustomed to the more highly colored style of modern romantic verse must not be misled by the monosyllabic diction, for it is the language of an overpowering emotion:

"Forget not yet the tried intent
Of such a truth as I have meant;
My great travail so gladly spent,
Forget not yet!

¹ P. 30.

² P. 108.

" Forget not yet the great assays,
 The cruel wrong, the scornful ways,
 The painful patience in delays,
 Forget not yet!"¹

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1518-1547), a grandson of Edward IV, was a courtier and a soldier. He was finely educated; he had passed a year at the French court; and though he never saw Italy, he knew the poetry of the Petrarchian school. Haughty, impetuous, daring, he was one of the last victims of Henry VIII and was executed on a false charge of treason. The tragedy of his early death excited the pity of the age and he became in Nashe's tale of *Jack Wilton* (1594) a purely legendary hero, breaking lances in Italy and seeing in a magic stone the image of his mistress in England, a myth which Scott used in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*.

In discussing the writings of Wyatt and Surrey, Puttenham states that their "conceits were loftie, their stiles stately, their conveyance cleanly, their terms proper, their meetre sweete and well proportioned, in all imitating very naturally and studiously their Maistre Francis Petrarcha," and that he can find very little difference between them.² The difference in their natures, however, is not hard to detect and it is clearly suggested if we place their portraits side by side, though remembering the Droeshout Shakespeare, we must not rely too confidently on such a comparison. Wyatt, unostentatiously dressed, gazes at us with a straightforward, vigorous, yet sad expression; Surrey, in court costume, with

¹ P. 123.

Apart from the poems we have cited, the reader will find the following well worthy of study: "Help me to seek" (his best rondeau); "Disdain me not"; "Since love will needs"; "Blame not my lute"; "What should I say"; "A face that should content me"; "Tagus, farewell."

² *Tottel's Miscellany*, Arber's reprint, p. xiii.

more delicate, aristocratic features, betrays in his look and carriage a certain haughty consciousness of rank. This difference of temperament is reflected in their poetry, for if Wyatt's verse has more fervor, Surrey's is more refined, more polished. In a word, Wyatt has the stronger poetic nature while Surrey is the better artist. This distinction must be explained at more length.

Surrey has left a much smaller body of verse than did Wyatt, for he was a more fastidious writer. He admired his contemporary; there was no rivalry between them; and in a poem written on Wyatt's death he praises him in these terms:

"A hand, that taught what might be said in rhyme!
That reft Chaucer the glory of his wit:
A mark, the which (unparfited, for time)
Some may approach, but never none shall hit,"¹

yet in the matter of style and finish Wyatt is inferior to Surrey, who employed fewer metres and used them to much better advantage. It will be noticed that in the sonnet of Wyatt's which we have quoted the accent is constantly wrenched, that is, the common prose accentuation of a word is changed for the sake of the metrical stress. A good example of this is

"And there campéth displaying his bannér."

Surrey avoids this fault in his translation of the same sonnet:

"Love, that doth reign and live within my thought,
And built his seat within my captive breast,
Clad in the arms wherein with me he fought,
Oft in my face he doth his banner rest.

¹ P. 29. In addition to this poem on Wyatt's death, Surrey wrote two sonnets in praise of him.

" But she that taught me love and suffer pain,
 My doubtful hope and eke my hot desire
 With shamefaced look to shadow and refrain,
 Her smiling grace converteth straight to ire.

" And coward Love, then, to the heart apace
 Taketh his flight, where he doth lurk and plain
 His purpose lost, and dare not show his face.
 For my lord's guilt thus faultless bide I pain."¹

Metrically this is a great advance, not only in the manner of accentuation but also in the careful avoidance of assonance, for Surrey, unlike Wyatt, refuses to consider "fleeth" and "appeareth," "banner" and "suffer," as rhymes. It is then as a refiner of English poetry that Surrey made his great reputation and for those times he seemed a perfect master of style. The sixteenth century poets delighted in recommending as a rule of conduct the golden mean—probably because they so rarely observed it—and they have left a whole group of poems on this subject, to which belongs Surrey's translation of Martial's *Ad Seipsum*. The concluding lines of one of its stanzas show the balanced sentence, reminding us of the more polished work of the age of Pope:

" Martial, the things that do attain
 The happy life, be these I find:
 The riches left, not got with pain,
 The fruitful ground, the quiet mind."²

The judgment of a man's contemporaries is not always a safe verdict to follow, yet Turberville, in the succeeding

¹ This is not the version ordinarily printed in editions of Surrey. See F. M. Padelford, *Early Sixteenth Century Lyrics*, Boston, 1907, p. L.

² *The Poems of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey*, London, Aldine edition, p. 56.

generation, well summed up the opinion of the time in regard to Surrey:

“ Each word in place with such a sleight is couched,
 Each thing whereof he treats, so firmly touched,
 As Pallas seemed within his noble breast
 To have sojourned, and been a daily guest.
 Our mother tongue by him hath got such light,
 As ruder speech thereby is banished quite.”¹

There is another important consideration in regard to his style. It will be noticed that in Surrey's translation of Petrarch's sonnet, he does not employ the Italian sonnet form but a new one, which he devised—three quatrains and a concluding couplet—a form which was so splendidly used by Shakespeare that it bears his name, though it should of right be called not the Shakespearean but the Surrey sonnet. There have been many interesting discussions as to the comparative artistic values of the Italian rhyme scheme and the form used by Surrey.² Not only is the musical effect of these two forms entirely different, but in the English sonnet there is not of necessity that marked division of the octave and the sestet, and this implies a difference in the treatment of the subject-matter.³ We may be sure that no deep, artistic considerations led the sixteenth century poets to prefer the Surrey to the Italian form; they adopted it because, as one may see by simple experiment, it is a much easier and more fluent means of expression, and fluency the Elizabethans prized most highly. That Shakespeare never

¹ *Verse in Praise of Lord Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey*, Chalmers, *The Works of the English Poets*, vol. II, p. 588.

² See W. Sharp, *Sonnets of this Century*, London, N. D., introduction; also *Century Magazine*, vol. LXXVI, p. 503.

³ It is of course possible to observe the octave and sestet in the Shakespearean sonnet, as may be seen in *When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes*.

blotted a line is his greatest praise. Ben Jonson, taunted that he took fifteen weeks to compose his play *The Poetaster*, replies that he composed *Volpone*, an acknowledged masterpiece, in five. The Elizabethans wrote rapidly because their manner of living demanded it. They could not spend days in searching for *le mot précis*, in putting together some highly wrought word mosaic, for their hours were too crowded; they lived intensely, and their designs and ambitions were large. Spenser's *Faerie Queene* is but a small fragment of the projected work. The age, then, found Surrey's sonnet form, because of its more simple rhyme scheme, a readier instrument of song than Petrarch's. If Wyatt brought the sonnet to England, Surrey equalled his achievement by giving to it a new form, surely as great a claim to remembrance as the fact that he was the first Englishman to write blank verse.

In the subject-matter of his verse, Surrey shows the all-powerful influence of Petrarch. In his translations and adaptations from the *Canzoniere* he chose, on the whole, much better poems than did Wyatt. We may refer also to the influence of the Italian school Surrey's sonnets to the Lady Geraldine, courtly compliments to a child that are no more to be considered serious expressions of feeling than are the effusions of Petrarch's followers.¹ His debt to the Italian poets is a considerable one; if he has not translated as freely from them as did Wyatt, in his style and in the general spirit of his verse we feel their influence. In spite of this fact, the subject-matter of his finest poem is all his own. His most sustained piece of writing is the poem describing his imprisonment at Windsor and lamenting the death of his brother-in-law, the Earl of Richmond. It is an elegy filled with picturesque details of their happy life together, in

¹ Only two sonnets, "From Tuscan came" and "The golden gift," can with any certainty be said to refer to her.

“ The large green courts, where we were wont to hove, (hover)
 With eyes cast up into the Maiden’s tower,
 And easy sighs, such as folk draw in love.
 The stately seats, the ladies bright of hue.
 The dances short, long tales of great delight;
 With words and looks that tigers could but rew;
 Where each of us did plead the other’s right.

* * * * *

The secret groves, which oft we made resound
 Of pleasant plaint, and of our ladies’ praise;
 Recording oft what grace each one had found,
 What hope of speed, what dread of long delays.
 The wild forest, the clothed holts with green;
 With reins availed, the swift y-breathed horse,
 With cry of hounds, and merry blasts between,
 Where we did chase the fearful hart of force.”¹

This is no conventional list of passed pleasures; every line is the actual living over again of happier days and the poem is one of the first elegies in our language in which a man recites his grief, using not allegory or biblical phrase, but the remembrance of definite events and of petty details to accentuate his sorrow.

The technique of this verse is good and Surrey is equally master of a lighter style; the tripping movement of the following lines clearly foretells the measures of the Elizabethan song writers:

“ Give place, ye lovers, here before
 That spent your boasts and brags in vain;
 My lady’s beauty passeth more
 The best of yours, I dare well sayen,
 Than doth the sun the candle light,
 Or brightest day the darkest night.”²

¹ From *So cruel prison how could betide, alas*, Aldine edition, p. 19.

² P. 31. Equally good is “Whe raging love,” p. 21.

Even in his elegy Surrey does not reach that intensity of feeling that gives such power to Wyatt's "Forget not yet," but his part in the development of the lyric is greater than Wyatt's because his style was a better one. In leaving these two poets we cannot do better than to quote the pithy couplet of the Elizabethan publisher, Richard Smith:

"Sweet Surrey sucked Parnassus springs,
And Wyatt wrote of wondrous things."¹

IV

Although the poems of Wyatt and Surrey were widely circulated in manuscripts and imitated during their life time, they were not actually published until after their death. In 1557 Richard Tottel brought out his famous *Songes and Sonnettes written by the ryght honorable Lorde Henry Haward late Earle of Surrey, and other*, the first printed anthology of English lyrics, generally called by the simpler title of *Tottel's Miscellany*. In the history of the lyric the publication of this book marks as distinct an epoch as did the appearance of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. The effect it produced may be measured by its reception; within two months it ran through two editions while in thirty years, eight editions were published, a remarkable record for those days. Shakespeare's sonnets, brought out half a century later when the reading public had grown in numbers, were a hundred years in reaching their third edition.

The second reprint of the *Miscellany* added thirty-nine poems by undesignated authors; taking the first and second editions together, Tottel printed forty poems by Surrey, ninety-six by Wyatt (somewhat more than half his verse), forty by Nicholas Grimald, together with one hundred and thirty anonymous poems. In Arber's reprint of Tottel, the poems of Wyatt, Surrey, and Grimald occupy but one hundred and twenty-three pages; those by uncertain authors

¹ Verses prefixed to the poems of George Gascoigne.

cover one hundred and forty-four and form what we may call the school of Wyatt and Surrey, for these unknown writers follow them in nearly every phase of their work.

Of all the poems printed by Tottel, only those by Wyatt and Surrey have any great literary value. Grimald has a few naïvely pathetic phrases in the poem on the death of his mother, but in general his work is tiresome and often ludicrous. At his best he writes:

“ What sweet relief the showers to thirsty plants we see,
 What dear delight the blooms to bees, my true love is to me.
 As fresh and lusty vere foul winter doth exceed, (spring)
 As morning bright with scarlet sky doth pass the evening’s
 weed,
 As mellow pears above the crabs esteemed be,
 So doth my love surmount them all, whom yet I hap to see;”

but this is beyond his accustomed style. If it is hardly fair to quote from the *Death of Zoroas* and *Ciceroes Death*, terrifying bits of doggerel in which not only those worthies but all poetry expired, at least the close of his *Garden* is characteristic:

“ O, what delights to us the garden ground doth bring,
 Seed, leaf, flower, fruit, herb, bee and tree, and more than I
 may sing.”¹

The poems by uncertain authors are equally disappointing. The sonnet is not yet a popular form, for Grimald contributes but three—none of them are translations—while the anonymous writers give us but nine in all. Of these twelve sonnets, one follows the strict Italian rhyme scheme;² three

¹ Arber's *Tottel*, pp. 96, 112.

² P. 197. I believe this is the first English sonnet that observes the Italian rhyme scheme, though there is no pause between the octave and sestet. It is evidently a translation; it commences:

“ For love Apollo (his godhead set aside)
 Was servant to the king of Thessaly.”

are written in an irregular form resembling Wyatt's; and eight adopt Surrey's arrangement of three quatrains and a concluding couplet, showing plainly what was to be the structure of the Elizabethan sonnet. Though two of the sonnets praise "Petrarch head and prince of poets all," on the whole there is but little direct imitation of the *Canzoniere* and very much of Wyatt and Surrey;¹ repeating their themes, twenty-one poems depict in utterly conventional language the griefs of love. We look for an advance over Wyatt and Surrey, but though at times there is a sign of progress in an easier rhythm, on the whole the poems fall far below their level. There are some exceptions such as Heywood's *Give place you ladies and begone*:

" If all the world were sought so far,
 Who could find such a wight!
 Her beauty twinkleth like a star
 Within the frosty night.

" Her rosial colour comes and goes
 With such a comely grace;
 Much ruddier, too, than doth the rose
 Within her lively face."

Equally graceful is:

" Such green to me as you have sent,
 Such green to you I send again;
 A flowering heart that will not faint,
 For dread of hope or loss of gain:
 A steadfast thought all wholly bent
 So that he may your grace obtain:
 As you by proof have always seen,
 To live your own and always green."²

¹ P. 178. On p. 230 is a translation, not in sonnet form, of Petrarch's sonnet, *Era il giorno*. The poem on p. 144 has many Petrarchian passages, imitating "Nel dolce tempo."

² Pp. 163, 187.

The aged lover renounceth love, by Lord Vaux, attained great popularity; it will be remembered that the grave-digger in *Hamlet*, in attempting to sing it, badly muddles the words. A Shakespearean audience quite familiar with the song would appreciate the humor of his travesty; the modern play-goer misses it entirely.

Tottel's Miscellany appeared in the last years of Mary's reign, on the very threshold of the Elizabethan era. Before we pass to this flowering time of the lyric we pause to consider what English poets had hitherto accomplished. To a certain extent the language had been refined; a model for verse had been found in the writings of the Italian and French poets; a small number of good English lyrics had been produced; but the English lyric was still undeveloped. It lacked a glowing style; it needed a more musical expression; and in its content it had merely grazed the surface of life. Certain poems of Wyatt and Surrey contradict this statement, but they are few in number, rare exceptions. Strangely enough there existed side by side with the translations and imitations of "Petrarch's long deceased woes," as Sidney called them, another body of poetry that contained the very qualities the English lyric lacked. The old English ballads were simple in their diction, swift in their movement, and strong in their portrayal of the great crises of human existence. They seized upon the impassioned moments of life; they depicted men and women swayed by the greatest emotions; and they stirred the hearts of those who heard them like a trumpet call. The English lyric had not done this. It is not a rule of lyric verse that it must always display the deeper feelings of humanity; many a fine song has been written upon a simple, even a trivial fancy, but in that case the form, the art of the expression gave to the lyric its value. This art of adorning a slight theme, the English poets lacked. To bring to the lyric color and form

and beauty, to breathe into it the breath of life was to be the work and the glory of the Elizabethan age.

We began our chapter with a discussion of the Italian lyric; we close it with a brief reference to the poetry of France which directed and inspired so much of Elizabethan verse. The influence of the Italian writers lasted throughout the sixteenth century. Not only did the lesser French poets, Melin de Saint-Gelais, Maurice Scève, Pontus de Tyard, De Baif, Olivier de Magny, pilfer the popular Italian anthologies, but even Du Bellay and Ronsard did not disdain to copy line for line from the lesser sonneteers. Every French schoolboy knows Du Bellay's sonnet, "Si notre vie est moins qu'une journée"—it is as current as Gray's *Elegy* with us. The poem is an almost literal translation of a sonnet by Bernardino Daniello commencing, "Se'l viver nostro è breve oscuro giorno."¹ This instance is a typical one. The Elizabethans were great admirers of Desportes and plagiarized from him shamelessly. His works, first published in 1573, pay ample tribute to the poetic supremacy of Italy; one hundred out of the four hundred and thirty-two sonnets in the eighth edition of his poems (1583) derive their inspiration from the other side of the Alps.²

But French verse, inspired by Italy, had its own triumphs and the Pléiade produced a large collection of lyrics, thoroughly original, that three centuries have not faded. Contrasted with the best sonnets of Ronsard, the quatorzains of Wyatt and Surrey have little poetic significance; with all their experiments in metre, with all their seeking after refinement, these fathers of our lyric verse never approached either the grace or the music of Du Bellay's *Chanson du Vanneur*, to take a typical poem. The lover of poetry returns again

¹ See J. Vianey, *Le Pétrarquisme en France au XVI^e siècle*, Montpellier, 1909, p. 116. This book is indispensable for a study of Elizabethan verse.

² P. 240.

and again to these French writers; he reads them for their sentiment and their charm of expression, but the Elizabethans regarded them as models of style, the ideal to which the English lyric must attain.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ELIZABETHAN LYRIC

I

The reign of Elizabeth is also the reign of song, for though we first think of that age as the blossoming time of the drama, rarely if ever in the history of literature has there been a period in which the lyric was so widely composed or when it entered so deeply into the life of the times. The Queen herself felt the lyric impulse and tried her hand at verse making (her great rival, Mary of Scotland, wrote French sonnets) and though Puttenham, as a faithful subject, pronounces her most characteristic ditty to be "passing sweet and harmonical," it certainly is neither. There is no womanly grace in these lines aiming at Mary Stuart; but we see in them the strong mind and hand that ruled England:

"The daughter of debate
That eke discord doth sow,
Shall reap no gain where former rule
Hath taught still peace to grow.

"No foreign banished wight
Shall anchor in this port,
Our realm it brooks no strangers' force;
Let them elsewhere resort."¹

The lyric, then, became the fashion. Men courted their mistresses in sonnets, and if they could not compose them, employed others to write them. A well-turned copy of verses could secure the patronage of some powerful noble and make

¹ See George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, reprinted by Arber, London, 1869, p. 254. Cf. E. Flügel, *Gedichte der Königin Elizabeth*, *Anglia*, XIV, p. 346.

one's fortune; a flattering song might rescue a courtier from disgrace and ruin. Friends addressed one another in rhyme and imitated each other's lyrics; precisely as an open letter in a modern newspaper draws out replies, so Elizabethan lyrics had their answers. "Were I a king, I could command content," writes Edward Vere, Earl of Oxford, and Sidney answers him "Wert thou a king, yet not command content," and another writer reminds him "The greatest kings do least command content." Dyer's long and uninspired *Fancy* is transposed by Southwell to a *Sinner's Complaint*, while Fulke Greville plays another variation on it.¹ Every mood had its song; if men were happy, they sang for sheer joy; in dejection they turned to verse making. The unfortunate Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, hardly possessed the poetic temperament. A rash, impulsive soldier, lacking depth and balance, rushing headlong into danger, verse would seem too fragile a weapon for his hand, yet Wotton, once his secretary, informs us that "to evaporate his thoughts in a sonnet was his common way." There is a tradition that his moving lyric

"Happy were he could finish forth his fate
In some unhaunted desert, most obscure,"

was sent to Elizabeth from Ireland in 1599, where, his army deserting and his fame shattered, disgrace and ruin stared him in the face.²

We think of the Elizabethan lyric as a light and careless song of happiness, but men turned to it in the deepest moments of life. In the reign of James I—but this incident is perfectly typical of the spirit of Elizabeth's day—John

¹ J. Hannah, *Poems of Wotton, Raleigh, etc.*, London, 1875, pp. 147-148; 154-173.

² P. 177.

Hoskins lay in the tower, charged with treason, which almost invariably implied a death sentence. His wife petitioned for his release with the following curious document:

“The worst is told; the best is hid:
Kings know not all; I would they did:
What though my husband once have erred?
Men more to blame have been preferred.
Who hath not erred, he doth not live;
He erred but once; once, King, forgive!”¹

This obtained the prisoner's pardon. Possibly the king feared another petition. In the tower, under the shadow of the block, men spent their last moments composing elegies and laments. “My prime of youth is but a frost of cares,” writes Tichborne, facing execution, and Southwell, racked and tortured, awaiting death, writes his tenderest religious lyrics. On the deathbed itself, men wrote their songs, and Sidney, in contempt of pain, sang one which he had made about his fatal wound, *La cuisse cassée*. From a contemporary account of the last hours of Walter Devereux (d. 1576) we read: “The night following, the Friday night, which was the night before he died, he called William Hewes, which was his musician, to play upon the virginal and to sing. ‘Play,’ said he, ‘my song, Will Hewes, and I will sing it myself.’ So he did it most joyfully, not as a howling swan, which still looking down waiteth her end, but as a sweet lark.”² And when a man died, his friends, not all poets by profession, felt it incumbent upon them to compose and publish elegies for him. To-day, this would be the saddest injury one's memory could suffer. For every emotion, for every circumstance of life, men of all classes—courtiers and

¹ P. 121.

² A. B. Grosart, *Miscellanies of the Fuller Worthies' Library, Poems of Vaux, Oxford, etc.* [London], 1872, Introduction, p. 13.

scholars, priests and soldiers, adventurers and statesmen—have written their songs. With us the lyric is sung by a few choice spirits to a small group of listeners; in the days of Elizabeth, it was the voice of the nation.

Within the compass of a single chapter it is difficult to deal with this wealth of lyric verse, or even to characterize it. The lyric spirit was all-pervasive, often eluding definition or analysis. The drama is full of lyrics, not the formal songs which we shall consider but song overflowing into dialogue, soliloquy and description; the epic and narrative verse has its lyric moments not in the songs introduced, but woven into the very fabric of the poems. The song of the rose in the second book of the *Faerie Queene* is not more lyrical than many another passage. We find, however, that the lyrics fall roughly into four general groups—the sonnets; the miscellaneous lyrics; the lyrics of the drama; and the lyrics in the song books. We shall consider them in this order.

II

The beginnings of the Elizabethan lyric were far from brilliant. One of the first writers to meet us is George Gascoigne (1525?-1577), whom an Italian admirer called “un’ immitatore di Petrarcha, amico d’Ariosto, e parangon di Bocaccio, Aretino ed ogni altro poeta quanto sia più famoso ed eccellente dell’ età nostra”¹ He is the most voluminous writer of verse since Skelton, but he has left few lyrics of value, for while at times he shows good metrical facility, he generally has little to say. His *Arraignment of a Lover*, one of his best lyrics, moves with a light step; we may call it an early example of society verse:

¹ J. W. Cunliffe, *The Posies of George Gascoigne*, Cambridge, 1907, p. 29.

“ At Beauty’s bar as I did stand,
 When false suspect accused me,
 ‘George,’ quoth the judge, ‘hold up thy hand,
 Thou art arraigned of Flattery:
 Tell therefore how thou wilt be tried?
 Whose judgment here wilt thou abide?’ ”¹

His *Lullaby of a lover* treats originally, gracefully, and with a genuine pathos, the old theme of approaching age; while his *Good morrow* opens with lines that foretell the future charm of the lyric. Unfortunately after such musical and unaffected writing as:

“ You that have spent the silent night
 In sleep and quiet rest,
 And joy to see the cheerful light
 That riseth in the East;
 Now clear your voice, now cheer your heart,
 Come help me now to sing;
 Each willing wight come bear a part,
 To praise the heavenly king.”

we come to the statement that “the carrion crow”

“ The devil resembleth plain.
 And as with guns we kill the crow
 For spoiling our relief,
 The devil so must we overthrow
 With gunshot of belief.”²

He has little sustained work and writes well as if by accident. It is interesting to observe that he continues the Surrey sonnet, but he has not written a single one of real poetic worth.

Gascoigne is the author of our first essay on verse composition, one paragraph of which is most illuminating. After some very sensible remarks upon the necessity of using in

¹ P. 38.

² P. 55.

verse the prose accentuation of words, and after recommending a monosyllabic diction ("the more monosyllables you use, the truer Englishman you are," he exclaims, and Addison repeats this thought in the *Spectator*), Gascoigne makes the following frank statement:

"To help you a little with rhyme (which is also a plain young scholar's lesson) work thus: when you have set down your first verse, take the last word thereof and count over all the words of the self same sound by order of the alphabet: As for example, the last word of your first line is *care*; to rhyme therewith you have *bare, clare, dare, fare, gare, hare, and share, mare, snare, rare, stare, and ware*, etc. Of all these, take that which best may serve your purpose carrying reason with rhyme; and if none of them will serve so, then alter the last word of your former verse, but yet do not willingly alter the meaning of your invention."¹

We have quoted this because most of the earliest Elizabethan lyrics seem to have been written on this principle of composition. This will be seen in glancing over the lyrics of George Turberville (1540?-1610?), who enjoyed a high contemporary reputation, for Harrington wrote of him

"When times were yet but rude, thy pen endeavoured
To polish barbarism with purer style:"

but he is a mere rhymester; he has no metrical skill; and nearly every page shows some evidence of a deplorable lack of taste, to say nothing of inspiration. He has left one good quatrain, a translation of a passage in Plato that has attracted many poets, among others, Shelley:

"My girl, thou gazest much
Upon the golden skies.
Would I were Heaven, I would behold
Thee then with all mine eyes."²

¹ P. 469.

² A. Chalmers' *The Works of the English Poets*, vol. II, p. 635.

We shall mention but one more of the early Elizabethans, Barnaby Googe (1540-1594) whose *Eglogs*, *Epytaphes*, and *Sonnettes* were published in a single volume in 1563, the year before Shakespeare's birth. The section of the book marked "sonnettes" does not contain an example of that form, for in general the Elizabethans used the term loosely, often calling any short poem, even a quatrain, a "sonnet." In Turberville's poems we find *Master George his Sonnet of the Pains of Love*:

"Two lines shall tell the grief,
That I by love sustain:
I burn, I flame, I faint, I freeze,
Of Hell I feel the pain."¹

As a matter of fact, this so-called "sonnet" contains all that we find in many later quatorzains. We discover in Googe the influence of *Tottel's Miscellany*, but except for a little more smoothness in his metres, he falls far below the level of that book. Only two of his "sonnets" deserve citation: "When I do hear thy name," retains the simplicity of the early songs:

"Thy voice when I do hear,
Then colour comes and goes,
Some time as pale as earth I look,
Some time as red as rose."

while his best lyric, "The rushing rivers that do run," contains these verses, "to the tune of Apelles":

"O Nature, thou that first did frame
My lady's hair of purest gold,
Her face of crystal to the same,
Her lips of precious rubies mold,
Her neck of alabaster white,
Surmounting far each other wight.

“Why didst thou not that time devise,
Why didst thou not foresee before,
The mischief that thereof doth rise,
And grief on grief doth heap with store,
To make her heart of wax alone,
And not of flint and marble stone?”¹

But these are scanty gleanings, and it was not until 1579 that the new poetry was ushered in with Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, of which we shall speak later, for we are now at the commencement of the sonnet cycles.²

Thomas Watson (1557?-1592) spent his time when a student at Oxford “in the smooth and pleasant studies of poetry and romance” and certainly obtained a thorough acquaintance not only with the Greek and Latin poets, but with the chief Italian lyrists from Petrarch down, and with Ronsard and his school. Beginning his literary career in 1589 with a Latin translation of the *Antigone*, he entered the field of the lyric the following year with his *Hekatompathia or Passionate Centurie of Love*, a hundred poems (“century”), by far the greater part translations or adaptations from the classics, the Italian, and the French. To each of these “Passions” or “sonnets” as he called them, Watson prefixed an explanation of its contents and a reference to its source or sources and it is thus a simple matter to follow him in his renderings of Theocritus and Horace, Petrarch, Serafino, and Ronsard. Though but eight of the poems are taken from Petrarch, Watson has much of his spirit (he tells us he had made a Latin translation of the sonnets of the *Canzoniere*) and indeed he was regarded as his English counterpart. George Bucke, in a copy of commendatory verses, informs him that

¹ Googe in Arber's *English Reprints*, London, 1371, pp. 95, 106.

² Strictly speaking the new movement in the Elizabethan lyric may be first discerned in Spenser's boyish translations from Petrarch and Du Bellay published in the *Theatre for Worldlings*, 1569.

"The stars, which did at Petrarch's birthday reign,
Were fixed again at thy nativity,"

and that compared with Petrarch and Laura

"Thou and thy dame be equal, save percase
Thou pass the one, and she excells the other."¹

Watson did not imitate the Petrarchian sonnet form, but employed instead a combination of three six line stanzas of the type later made famous by Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*. The poems are free translations and at times mosaics, for in one, the first twelve lines are each taken from a different author. Lacking in inspiration, Watson frequently descended to what Addison called false wit. He possesses little imagination or feeling; there is no force in his writing; and it was hardly necessary for him to inform us that his pains are "but supposed." The best that can be said of him is that he shows, at times, an easy, graceful style and that he has a plaintive note, not without a certain charm, as in his ninth *Passion*:

"The marigold so likes the lovely sun
That when he sets, the other hides her face,
And when he gins his morning course to run,
She spreads abroad, and shows her greatest grace;
So shuts or sprouts my joy, as doth this flower,
When my sunshine doth either laugh or lower."²

There is a delicacy of expression in such a line as

"Each thought I think is friend to her I love,

and the two *Passions* beginning "My gentle bird, which sung so sweet of late," and "When May is in his prime," are good examples of his best qualities.³

¹ Thomas Watson, in Arber's *English Reprints*, London, 1870, p. 33.

² P. 45.

³ Pp. 52, 62.

In 1593, the year after Watson's death, appeared his *Tears of Fancie*, a series of sixty sonnets in the Surrey form. They are much better reading, though they bear the marks of foreign imitation. A single quotation shows their style:

“ Behold, dear mistress, how each pleasant green
Will now renew his summer's livery:
The fragrant flowers which have not long been seen,
Will flourish now ere long in bravery.
But I, alas, within whose mourning mind
The grafts of grief are only given to grow,
Can not enjoy the Spring which others find,
But still my will must wither all in woe.”¹

Watson enjoyed a high reputation in his own day, but he deserves the oblivion into which he has fallen and from which Professor Arber gallantly tried to rescue him, for he has left us no poem of the first order and we remember him only as the author of our earliest love sequence and as one of our first writers of madrigals.²

The first Elizabethan sonnet sequence worthy to be compared with the Italian or French cycles is Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*. Sidney (1554-1586) was a scholar, courtier, and soldier; a critic, novelist, and poet, yet for all his varied interests and his recognized brilliancy, he had neither a fortunate nor a happy career. A member of a distinguished family, nephew to Elizabeth's favorite, the Earl of Leicester, he naturally looked forward to a position of influence in state affairs, but he displeased the queen, who gave him the trifle of three million acres in Virginia but no share in the government. Once in despair, for he was actually poor, he contemplated emigrating to this domain.

¹ P. 202.

² *Italian Madrigals Englished*, 1590, reprinted in the *Journal of Germanic Philology*, vol. II, No. iii, p. 337.

An American can not forbear conjecturing what the early history of the Virginia colony would have been had Sidney and a group of his friends inaugurated it. Unfortunate in his public life, he found his greatest pleasure in his writings and in the friendship of a group of poets of whom Spenser was the chief. His nature was a serious one; melancholy had marked him for her own; and his Huguenot friend and counsellor Languet, a man whose character was anything but frivolous, protested that Sidney was of a too sober disposition. In his miniature painted by Oliver we see him seated beneath a tree, in a doublet slashed with black, pensive, mournful, one arm across his breast, the other holding his sword—a Lover's Melancholy or *Il Penseroso*, we might call it. Could any one be better fitted to continue the Petrarchian tradition of unhappy love?

Astrophel and Stella was printed surreptitiously in 1591, five years after Sidney's death. So far from desiring it to be published, on his deathbed he begged his friends to burn his writings; an injunction which certainly included the sonnets as well as the unfinished *Arcadia*. Ostensibly this sonnet cycle portrays Sidney's love for Penelope Devereux (1562?-1607). The daughter of the Earl of Essex, she had been destined by her father to marry Sidney, who showed no interest in her until after her unhappy match with Lord Rich in 1581. Some time between that date and Sidney's marriage to Frances Walsingham in 1583 these sonnets were written. Their interpretation is still a matter of dispute.¹ Read literally they portray Sidney's devotion for a married woman who loves him in return. Restrained by a sense of honor, she makes of Sidney a Platonic lover. To us the situation seems an impossible one, but the Renaissance treated it as seriously as we would a genuine passion swaying a man and a maid. Tasso could write to a bride on her marriage,

¹J. B. Fletcher, *The Religion of Beauty in Woman*, N. Y., 1911, pp. 147-165, "Did Astrophel love Stella?"

urging her, in the inevitable sonnet, to reserve for him the best part of her love. Evidently to interpret Elizabethan sonnet cycles in terms of the nineteenth century is madness, yet Symonds, disregarding the exotic as well as the conventional element in *Astrophel and Stella*, has constructed from it a whole romance, with each step in the growth of Sidney's passion clearly marked—imaginative but scarcely reasonable criticism. On the other hand, Sidney Lee goes so far as to deny that these sonnets possess "any serious autobiographic significance."¹ The truth probably lies midway between these two opinions, in the "golden mean" which the Elizabethans praised. To draw an analogy from a sister art, the painters of the Renaissance often placed amid a group of figures, purely imaginary, their own portraits. It is very probable that at times, amid the translations and evident imitations of the sonnets, we may discover Sidney himself. It is this fact, as well as the inherent poetic worth of the sequence, that makes it a landmark in the history of the English lyric.

After leaving Oxford in 1572, Sidney passed nearly three years on the continent. In the course of his journeys, he visited Venice, a home of the Petrarchian school. A tablet still marks the house on the Riva degli Schiavoni which the "liberality of the senate" offered to Petrarch, and thanks to Bembo and his followers, the influence of his song still lingered there. As in the case of Wyatt, this glimpse of Italy determined in a large measure Sidney's poetic career. That he entered with zest into Venetian life can not be doubted; he had his portrait painted by Veronese and he must have turned to that art which interested him more than painting. It would be strange indeed if he did not read the poetry of Petrarch and of his lesser clan. Though he

¹J. A. Symonds, *Sidney, in English Men of Letters*; Sidney Lee, Introduction to *Elizabethan Sonnets*, vol. I, in the re-issue of Arber's *English Garner*.

imitated the French sonneteers, I believe he derived much of his inspiration directly from Italy, rather than through the medium of French verse. Several of his songs were written to Italian music, and it is hardly necessary to point out that the situation in *Astrophel and Stella* is precisely that of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, indeed the very title "Stella" is derived from the Petrarchians.¹ Accordingly much of our analysis and criticism of the *Canzoniere* may be applied to Sidney's sequence. Coming from a reading of the Petrarchists, we hear their music re-echoing in many a line of Sidney's laments even when we can not detect formal imitation.

It is unfortunate that despite Sidney's great reputation, *Astrophel and Stella* is little known to-day; for the most persistent reader of English verse would probably have difficulty in citing a dozen lines from his sonnets. Charles Lamb devoted an essay to them, quoting with a few comments the ones he most admired, yet he failed to awaken an interest in the poet; at the present time Sidney is known only by those poems that attract compilers of anthologies. The reason for this neglect is the inequality of his work.

¹ L. Dolce begins a sonnet:

"Stella; che degna ben vi dimostrate
Del nome, che sì dolce e altero suona;"

while Rinieri has two beginning, "Celeste forma, anzi lucente stella;" and "Questa nuova del ciel felice Stella." Marco Cavallo, a well-known Venetian, secretary to the Cardinal Marco Conaro, is fond of addressing his mistress under this name:

"Si come l'amorosa, e vaga stella,
Ch'a l'alba inanzi sempre apparir sole,
Con suoi fulgenti rai fa scorte Sole,

* * * * *

Tal la mia Donna; che dal quella luce
Prese il bel nome, e i bei celeste rai."

I take these quotations from *Rime Diverse*, vols. I and II.

Although he asserted that he was "no pick purse of another's wit," he admitted that he had spent his time

"Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburnt brain,"¹

and unfortunately in this process he absorbed too many ideas from the Petrarchists. A considerable number of sonnets, which the age considered witty and ingenious, we find insipid, tedious, and even ridiculous, for literary fashions soon change and it is quite possible that succeeding generations will yawn as wearily over our twentieth century epigrams and paradoxes as we do over Sidney's sonnet that describes Stella's face as a house (an old device) with her mouth the door, her hair the golden roof, and her eyes the windows.² Equally uninspired are those sonnets in which Cupid appears; in a typical one, Stella's eyebrows form his bow.³ As a rule, Cupid is the evil genius of the Elizabethan lyric; there are rare exceptions such as Lyly's song *Cupid and my Campaspe played*, which employs this conceit of Sidney's. We must admit that many of the sonnets have neither personal nor poetical significance.

Discarding the poorer element, we turn to the best, by which a writer must always be judged. It is impossible to avoid seeing in a small group of sonnets a presentation of Sidney's own life, for he did follow the Muse's injunction to "look in thy heart, and write"; he has left many lines which "bewray an inward touch." We believe this because many of the sonnets square exactly with the course of Sidney's career. With Petrarch and his followers the *enamoremment* comes at the first glance of beauty; with Sidney it was not love at first sight:

¹ See Lee's *Elizabethan Sonnets*, vol. I, *Astrophel and Stella*, sonnet i.

² No. ix.

³ No. xvii.

'Not at the first sight, nor with a dribbed shot,
 Love gave the wound, which while I breathe, will bleed:
 But known worth did in mine of time proceed, (by slow
 undermining)
 Till, by degrees, it had full conquest got,"

and again he cries:

" 'I might—unhappy word, O me!—I might,
 And then would not, or could not see my bliss."

The Petrarchians insist that their love incites the soul to virtuous deeds, and Sidney often follows them; in a sonnet speaking of Stella's goodness and beauty he writes:

"And not content to be perfection's heir,
 Thyself dost strive all minds that way to move;
 Who mark in thee, what is in thee most fair:
 So while thy beauty draws the heart to love,
 As fast thy virtue bends that love to good.
 But ah! Desire still cries, 'Give me some food!' "¹

This last line is the significant one; Sidney wears his rue with a difference, for Platonic idealism does not satisfy him. Moreover while the Petrarchists weary us with assertions that their love ennobles them, Sidney is warned that his passion can lead only to a dishonorable conclusion:

"Alas! have I not pain enough? my friend!

* * * * *

But with your rhubarb words ye must contend
 To grieve me worse in saying 'That Desire
 Doth plunge my well-formed soul even in the mire
 Of sinful thoughts, which do in ruin end.' "²

After Sidney's death, Stella deserted her husband who had been forced upon her and who treated her with neglect and

¹ Nos. ii, xxxiii, lxxi.

² No. xiv.

even with brutality. In itself this is not a sufficient argument to discredit Sidney's statement that her firmness and her affection for him prevented a catastrophe which would have involved them both. [The two sonnets in which Sidney plays upon the name of Stella's husband, Lord Rich, are quite different from the sonnets in which Petrarch puns on Laura's name; Sidney writes in scorn and anger of

"that rich fool, who by blind Fortune's lot,
The richest gem of love and life enjoys;
And can with foul abuse such beauties blot."¹

Hitherto the lyrical poets had not put into verse the trivial yet important happenings of their lives, and Sidney marks a progress when he does this. Many of his poems refer to definite events. He meets Stella riding uncovered when other ladies fear the sun; he sees her moved to tears by the reading of a love tragedy; he hears her read his own verses; Stella

"Who, hard by, made a window send forth light:"

(a splendid phrase) sees him win in a tourney.² These are indeed slight occurrences but it is the weaving into verse of all a man's moods and impressions as well as his greater emotions that makes the lyric the real voice of the human spirit. From another point of view, on such slender happenings have depended the greatest artistic results. The song of a lark in the fields, of a nightingale in a covert, of a peasant girl in the Scottish highlands, have enriched English literature with three priceless lyrics.

The sonnets certainly reveal Sidney's nature. He is an aristocrat, moving in courtly circles, proud of his birth and

¹ No. xxiv; cf. xxxvii, a sonnet suppressed in the first edition of *Astrophel and Stella* and not printed until 1598.

² Nos. xxii, xlv, lviii, liii.

rank; he remembers the achievements of his family and asks how

"Ulster likes of that same golden bit,
Wherewith my father once made it half tame?"

He is proud of his horsemanship, his strength, his skill in the jousts which even the French, past masters in such pursuits, cover with applause:

"Youth, luck and praise even filled my veins with pride."

He has all the culture of his day; we see him reading Plato,

"The wisest scholar of the wight most wise,"

while "Aristotle's wit" he values as highly as Cæsar's fame. What a contrast between the sonnets of this young nobleman and those of that "unlettered clerk" who went here and there "a motley to the view." Yet many of Sidney's lines foretell Shakespeare.

"With what sharp checks I in myself am shent,
When into Reason's audit I do go;
And by just counts, myself a bankrupt know
Of all those goods which heaven to me hath lent,"

might have come from the greatest of all Elizabethan sonneteers.¹

Judging the sonnets from the purely artistic standpoint, not many are well written throughout; they are frequently marred by roughness of phrase and by obscurity of construction and expression. In general they lack that sweetness of cadence which we associate with the sonnet form, for though Sidney employs the Petrarchian rhyme scheme, he ends his sestet, with disconcerting effect, in a couplet. If the verse is at times halting, it has vigor and movement:

¹ Nos. xxx, liii, xxv (cf. xxi), xviii.

"Highway! since you my chief Parnassus be;
 And that my Muse to some ears not unsweet,
 Tempers her words to trampling horses' feet
 More oft than to a chamber melody."¹

In such an apostrophe we first see an individual style in the English sonnet. Even in his purely imitative verse, Sidney can be at his best. The Petrarchian school has left us many sonnets on sleep. Giovanni della Casa's masterpiece is a typical one:

"O Sonno, o della queta, umida, ombrosa
 Notte placido figlio; o de' mortali
 Egri conforto, oblio dolce de' mali
 Sì gravi, ond'è la vita aspra e noiosa;
 Soccorri al core omai, che langue, e posa
 Non have; e queste membra stanche e frali
 Solleva: a me te n' vola, O Sonno, e l'ali
 Tue brune sovra me distendi e posa."

(O Sleep, peaceful son of the quiet, dewy, shadowy night; comfort of weary mortals, sweet oblivion of heavy ills, whence life is rough and wearisome; aid now the heart that languishes nor has repose; lift up these limbs, weary and frail; fly to me, O Sleep, and thy brown wings spread over me.)

Shakespeare, in his great speech of Macbeth, shows the influence of such lines and Sidney has as fine an imagery, as musical an appeal in his

"Come Sleep! O Sleep! the certain knot of peace;
 The baiting place of wit, the balm of woe,
 The poor man's wealth, the prisoner's release,
 Th' indifferent judge between the high and low."²

¹ No. lxxxiv.

² No. xxxix. E. Koeppl, *Romanische Forschungen*, V, p. 97, after having pointed out passages in which Sidney imitates the Italian lyric, observes justly: "Sidney could not escape the powerful influence of Petrarch, he has paid him rich tribute, but he has poured so much new wine in the old bottles that no one can contest his right to say, 'I am no pick-purse of another's wit.'"

In the midst of the most ineffective sonnets there is generally some spark of the divine fire, some noble line such as

“Those lips! which make death’s pay, a mean price for a kiss.”

His best known sonnet is certainly his finest one; it is thoroughly characteristic—unevenly written, obscurely expressed in the concluding line, but infused with fine emotion:

“With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb’st the skies!
How silently, and with how wan a face!”¹

Shelley might have written this. Here for the first time in the English lyric we have a deep sorrow illumined by the light of the poet’s imagination.

In 1593 Barnaby Barnes (1569-1609) published his *Parthenophil and Parthenophe. Sonnets, Madrigals, Elegies and Odes*, a wearisome collection of verse—there are over one hundred sonnets alone—which may be characterized as containing much matter but little art. At times he links his sonnets together. The first nine treat of the imprisonment and release of his heart; sonnets xxxii-xliii describe a zodiac of love; but on the whole the book is a series of disconnected love poems, imitations or adaptations of Petrarch, Sannazzaro, Ronsard, and the French school, while the classics are represented by the *Lost Cupid* of Moschus. Although the greater part of the book has not been traced directly to its foreign sources, there are many reminiscences of the Petrarchian school. Barnes wishes his love to be

¹ No. xxxi. Cf. Shelley’s

“Art thou pale for weariness
Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth.”

It is interesting to remember that Sidney is the one Elizabethan poet who enjoyed a reputation in France. See the reference in *Nöes* of Du Bartas to “milor Cydné,” “Cygne doux chantant,” and contrast it with the slighting allusion to Ben Jonson in Saint Amant’s *Albion*.

“ ’bove Stella placed;
'Bove Laura.”

and employs the usual themes—death, sleep, a lover's sufferings—the old similes, the old phraseology. Of the writer himself, we see nothing.

There is one interesting trait in his style; his penchant for legal terms, which he tortures and twists to meet a lover's woes. As Mr. Lee suggests, it is highly interesting to compare the similar phrases in Shakespeare's sonnets.

“ But when the mortgage should have cured the sore,
She passed it off, by deed of gift before,”

he writes, or

“ And when, through thy default, I thee did summon
Into the Court of Steadfast Love, then cried,
'As it was promised, here stands his heart's bail!
And if in bonds to thee, my love be tied,
Then by those bonds, take forfeit of the sale.’ ”¹

How far is all this from:

“ When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,”

or

“ Farewell! thou art too dear for my possessing,
And like enough thou know'st thy estimate:
The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;
My bonds in thee are all determinate.”

Shakespeare repeats in his sonnets the situations, the ideas, the emotions of his predecessors, but he has so refined and transformed them that we forget, as we do in reading the poems of Burns, how much has been suggested by unremembered singers.

¹ *Parthenophil, sonnets*, nos. viii, xi; in Lee's *Elizabethan Sonnets*, vol. I.

Barnes has one sure claim to remembrance. Like Arvers, the author of

“ Mon âme a son secret, ma vie a son mystère,”

he is the poet of one sonnet. We read on through allegories and the commonplaces of mythology, until we reach sonnet lxxv which closes as follows:

“ Oh that I never had been born at all,
Or being, had been born of shepherds' brood!
Then should I not in such mischances fall,
Quiet, my water; and Content, my food.
But now disquieted, and still tormented,
With adverse fate, perforce, must rest contented.”

There is nothing remarkable in all this, but these few lines gave Barnes the suggestion, the impulse for the sonnet that immediately follows. It is marked by a pensive sweetness, a gentle melancholy (for Barnes had no deep feeling). To borrow a figure from music, when he bears hard on the strings, they scrape and grate. Here for once he found himself:

“ Ah, sweet Content! where is thy mild abode?
Is it with shepherds, and light-hearted swains,
Which sing upon the downs, and pipe abroad,
Tending their flocks and cattle on the plains?
Ah, sweet Content! where dost thou safely rest?
In heaven, with angels? which the praises sing
Of Him that made, and rules at his behest,
The minds and hearts of every living thing.
Ah, sweet Content! where dost thine harbour hold?
Is it in churches, with religious men,
Which please the gods with prayers manifold;
And in their studies meditate it then?
Whether thou dost in heaven, or earth appear;
Be where thou wilt! Thou wilt not harbour here!”¹

¹ Nos. lxxv, lxxvi.

Two other sonnet series appeared in 1593. Thomas Lodge's *Phyllis* consists of forty sonnets, gracefully written but for the most part boldly plagiarized from Ronsard and Desportes, from Ariosto and other Italian writers. His collection is interesting chiefly as exhibiting in the most striking manner the dependence of the Elizabethan sonnetteers on foreign models; it contains hardly a sonnet worthy to be treasured in the reader's memory, although Lodge elsewhere shows lyric gifts of a high order.

As for Giles Fletcher's *Licia*, the author tells us in his preface that he wrote it "only to try my humour," but its fifty-two sonnets are much more trying to the reader's patience; we weary of the incessant appearance of Cupid, even though at times he is presented with some grace. Fletcher is unoriginal and has left little to be remembered. One of the best sonnets in *Licia* reminds us of Shakespeare as did the legal phraseology of Barnes:

"In time the strong and stately turrets fall.
In time the rose, and silver lilies die.
In time the monarchs captives are and thrall.
In time the sea and rivers are made dry.

* * * * *

Thus all, sweet Fair, in time must have an end:
Except thy beauty, virtues, and thy friend."¹

The following year, 1594, saw the publication of five sonnet cycles, the anonymous *Zepheria*, Percy's *Cælia*, Constable's *Diana*, Daniel's *Delia*, and Drayton's *Idea*.² The

¹ No. xxviii in Lee's reprint of *Licia*, in *op. cit.*, vol. II. For Fletcher's borrowings see A. B. Grosart's edition of *Licia* in *Occasional Issues*, II.

² Reprinted by Lee, *op. cit.*, vol. II. *Diana* was first issued 1592; re-issued, enlarged, 1594. At the end of *Astrophel and Stella*, 28 of Daniel's sonnets were printed unauthorizdly. The following year he published 55 sonnets and in 1594 revised and enlarged this collection. See Lee, *op. cit.*, Introduction.

most that can be said of the twenty sonnets in *Cælia*, and the forty canzons in *Zepheria* is that their publication bears witness to the interest in sonnet literature to which they add nothing. Constable's *Diana* is written with much more skill, and the following sonnet is interesting because it brings to a trite subject a new air:

“ If ever Sorrow spoke from soul that loves,
 As speaks a spirit in a man possest,
 In me, her spirit speaks. My soul it moves,
 Whose sigh-swoll'n words breed whirlwinds in my breast:
 Or like the echo of a passing bell,
 Which sounding on the water, seems to howl;
 So rings my heart a fearful heavy knell,
 And keeps all night in consort with the owl.”¹

These are not the customary similes of the Elizabethan sonnet, and we seem to hear in them anticipatory strains of the lyric of melancholy, of Fletcher's

“ A midnight bell, a parting groan—
 These are the sounds we feed upon:”

or Milton's far-off curfew, sounding

“ Over some wide watered shore,
 Swinging slow with sullen roar.”

The collections of Daniel and Drayton well repay the reader. Samuel Daniel (1562-1619) was educated at Oxford, had travelled in Italy, and enjoyed the friendship of the great. He was a careful writer; his style was his best quality, for though many of his sonnets are taken from the Italian and the French (he certainly deserves the harsh title of plagiarist), they avoid that awkwardness of expression which often accompanies translation in a fixed poetic form. His lines have such grace and smoothness that they may be

¹ Sonnet iii of the “Fifth Decade” in Lee's reprint.

regarded as something more than an echo of another's thought:

"Rendez à l'or cette couleur qui dore
Ces blonds cheveux,"

writes Du Bellay in his *Olive* (sonnet xci):

"Restore thy treasure to the golden ore.
Yield Cytherea's son those arks of love!"

is Daniel's version. Coleridge, commenting on his style, points out that in his phraseology Daniel is distinctly a man of our own day, and his vocabulary does indeed sound modern when contrasted with that of Shakespeare's sonnets. The father was a musician and the son certainly inherited the musician's ear, for his phrases have a dying fall; their melody is tender, soft, and grave, but the deeper notes are never struck, and the stronger feelings are untouched.

"Reign in my thoughts, fair hand, sweet eye, rare voice,"

is a typical line in its even modulation.

As we have stated, the sonnets are a series of graceful translations, and we must not expect self-revelation here. The love he describes is a Platonic one:

"My spotless love hovers, with purest wings,
About the temple of the proudest frame;
Where blaze those lights, fairest of earthly things,
Which clear our clouded world with brightest flame."

and it is dedicated to

"A modest maid, decked with a blush of honour,
Whose feet do tread green paths of youth and love;
The wonder of all eyes that look upon her:
Sacred on earth, designed a saint above."

His subjects are the conventional ones. In contradistinction to the immortality which he can confer by his verses, he sings

the fading of beauty—it is “Mignonne, allons voir si la rose” of Ronsard.

“ Look Delia, how we ’steem the half-blown rose,”

or

“ Beauty, sweet love, is like the morning dew;
Whose short refresh upon the tender green,
Cheers for a time, but till the sun doth show:
And straight ’tis gone, as it had never been.”

His best known sonnet sums up his qualities, for it is gentle, musical, and above all—reminiscent of Cariteo, della Casa, and Desportes.

“ Care-charmer Sleep! son of the sable Night,
Brother to death! In silent darkness born!
Relieve my anguish and restore the light,
With dark forgetting of my cares, return.”¹

Michael Drayton (1563-1631) is frank enough in an introductory sonnet prefixed to his *Idea* in 1599 to warn the reader not to look for passion in his verses; yet we must not conclude that he regarded his sonnets as a poetic pastime of small value, for he constantly reissued them, with revisions, suppressions and additions, until the original fifty-one had grown to a hundred by the last edition, 1619. Whether or not Anne Goodere is to be considered as the subject of these poems, it is evident that he is a frankly imitative writer, offering us the thoughts common to all the sonneteers. Realizing the conventionality of his themes and remembering his own frank statement, we can not but smile when he bids us

“ read at last the story of my woe,
The dreary abstracts of my endless cares,
With my life’s sorrow interlined so,
Smoked with my sighs, and blotted with my tears.
The sad memorials of my miseries.”

¹ Nos. xii, vi, xxxiv, xlv, xlix in Lee’s reprint of *Delia*.

Yet Drayton writes with such vivacity that even when he is artificial, indulging in conceits, he interests us. His note is not so grave or tender as Daniel's; he has an easier, simpler, and at times, an almost conversational style.

"How many paltry, foolish painted things,
That now in coaches trouble every street,
Shall be forgotten (whom no poet sings)
Ere they be well wrapped in their winding sheet!"

Without the long, slow movement of Daniel, his verse is musical:

"Dear, why should you command me to my rest,
When now the world doth summon all to sleep?
Methinks, this time becometh lovers best.
Night was ordained together friends to keep."

Here we have the familiar sonnet on night, yet with a new motive. He strikes the old Platonic note in one of his best sonnets:

"Clear Ankor, on whose silver-sanded shore
My soul shrined Saint, my fair Idea lives;
O blessed brook! whose milk-white swans adore
Thy crystal stream, refined by her eyes,"

but no counterpart has been found for the one on which his fame will rest.

In the 1599 edition of his sonnets there is one *To Humour* which begins:

"You cannot love, my pretty Heart! and why?
There was a time you told me that you would."

Here we have a brisk dialogue; the lines move trippingly as the poet smiles at the contradictions of woman, knowing

"Your love and hate is this, I now do prove you,
You love in hate, by hate to make me love you."¹

¹ Nos. liv, vi, xxxvii, lili, xli in Lee's reprint of the *Idea*.

It is not always that a poet's last word is his best, but in the final edition of the *Idea*, 1619, there appeared for the first time a sonnet in this same *genre*, "Since there's no help, come, let us kiss and part." Though we may well hesitate to call it, as did Rossetti, the finest sonnet in the language, it is certainly a masterpiece. Fortunately it is so well known that it needs little comment, though we may point out that the personification is perfectly employed, one of the rare instances in Elizabethan sonnet literature:

"Now, at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,
When his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies;
When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,
And Innocence is closing up his eyes:"

and that the concluding couplet is an epitome of the whole tragi-comedy of love:

"Now, if thou wouldst, when all have given him over,
From death to life, thou might'st him yet recover."

The twenty sonnets by Richard Barnfield, published with his *Cynthia* in 1595, are interesting only in the fact that contrary to the established custom they picture not a maiden but a youth, Ganymede.¹ This same year appeared a most important collection, Spenser's *Amoretti*. These sonnets are considered by critics as second only to Shakespeare's. This undoubtedly is a just estimate, for they maintain throughout a higher poetic level than the sequences we have considered, though there are many times when Sidney writes with more energy and poignancy; no lines in the *Amoretti* have the imaginative force of his apostrophe to the moon. It is a sufficient criticism of the æsthetic worth of these poems to say that we clearly recognize in them the writer of the *Faerie Queene* and though in one of his sonnets

¹ *Cynthia* is reprinted in A. H. Bullen's *Longer Elizabethan Poems*, re-issue of Arber's *English Garner*.

Spenser declares that he is worn out with his arduous work on the epic of Faeryland, his style shows little trace of exhaustion.¹ As he had invented his own metre for his greatest work, so here he devises a new sonnet form, linking the three quatrains together by rhyming the last line of one to the first line of the next. The verses have a slow, tender cadence; the music is delicate and gentle; there are few discords, rarely a harsh tone.

“ Fresh Spring, the herald of love’s mighty king,
 In whose coat-armour richly are displayed
 All sorts of flowers, the which on earth do spring,
 In goodly colours gloriously arrayed;✓
 Go to my love, where she is careless laid,
 Yet in her winter’s bower not well awake;
 Tell her the joyous time will not be stayed,
 Unless she do him by the forelock take;✓
 Bid her therefore herself soon ready make,
 To wait on Love amongst his lovely crew; ✓
 Where every one, that misseth then her make,
 Shall be by him amerced with penance due. ✓
 Make haste, therefore, sweet love, while it is prime ✓
 For none can call again the passed time.”²

No Elizabethan sequence gives the English reader so good an idea of the music of the Petrarchians as does the *Amorretti*, even though Spenser abandons their rhyme scheme.

Turning to the content of the poems, we observe that Spenser, like Prometheus so dear to the sonneteers, has “filched his fire” on many occasions. Ronsard and Desportes furnished him with numerous passages and there are many traces of the Petrarchists in his account of the truces and ambushes, the sieges and assaults of his heart; or in such conceits as “My love is like to ice and I to fire.” His mis-

¹ No. lxxx. Cf. xxxiii, Lee’s reprint, *op. cit.*

² No. lxx.

tress, now a "sweet" or "cruel" warrior, now his "saint," resembles the heroines of whom we have read. She is

"The glorious image of the Maker's beauty,
My sovereign saint, the idol of my thought,

* * * * *

And of the brood of angels heavenly born;
And with the crew of blessed saints upbrought,
Each of which did her with their gifts adorn."¹

With every allowance, however, for the spirit of imitation which affected Spenser as it did in various degrees every sonneteer of the period, this collection was written for a creature of flesh and blood—the Elizabeth who became his wife and for whom he composed the *Epithalamion*, first printed with these sonnets.² If Spenser frequently uses the popular imagery of the day, he is none the less sincere. The idealism that pervades these sonnets, the Platonic conceptions of love and beauty, were no empty phrases for the greatest Platonist in our poetry, and his worship of beauty and his belief that it is but a manifestation of a rarer beauty of soul re-echoes the splendid enthusiasm of his hymns:

Men call you fair, and you do credit it,
For that yourself ye daily such do see:
But the true fair, that is the gentle wit,
And virtuous mind, is much more praised of me:

* * * * *

That is true beauty; that doth argue you
To be divine, and born of heavenly seed;—
Derived from that fair Spirit from whom all true
And perfect beauty did at first proceed."³

¹No. lxi; cf. xi-xiv, xxx, lvii, xlix.

²I cannot accept P. W. Long's contention that the *Amoretti* were composed in honor of Lady Elizabeth Carey. See *M. L. Review*, vol. III, p. 257; cf. vol. V, p. 273.

³No. lxxix; for other sonnets expressing the Platonic conception of love, see lxxii, lxxxvii.

Love with him is a pure religion and changing Milton's line:

"the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
To scorn delights, and live laborious days."

There is no darker side to the picture, as in Shakespeare's sonnets; no storm, not even a cloud disturbs the loveliness of the spring day, for we are in a fragrant meadow where

"The merry cuckoo, messenger of spring,
His trumpet shrill hath thrice already sounded,
That warns all lovers wait upon their king,
Who now is coming forth with garland crowned."¹

Though every sonneteer professes the conviction that his verses must live forever in the minds of men, when Spenser in his splendid sonnet "One day I wrote her name upon the strand" exclaims:

"let baser thing devise
To die in dust, but you shall live by fame:
My verse your virtues rare shall eternize,
And in the heavens write your glorious name.
Where, when as death shall all the world subdue,
Our love shall live, and later life renew,"²

we feel the ring of sincerity, for he believes that such a love as his must be eternal.

The sonnet collections that followed the *Amoretti* are unimportant. In 1596 appeared Griffin's *Fidessa*, Linche's *Diella*, and Smith's *Chloris*.³ The writers have nothing to tell us; they plagiarize and imitate, and by this time the most energetic reader has become wearied of sonnets describing the theft of Prometheus, the storm-tossed sailor,

¹ No. xix.

² No. lxxv.

³ Reprinted by Lee, *op. cit.*, vol. II.

the siege of a heart, the bird caught in the fowler's snare; he listens unmoved to "sighs of most heart-breaking might" and to the portrayal of a lover's torments; and he has become impatient of the endless invocations to sleep, to night, and to death. Of the large number of sonnets which we have described, very few satisfy us, for we read them not to understand the literary fashions of the age, but to feel the thrill, the inspiration that inspired song awakens in us. The Elizabethan lyric, unequalled in certain of its aspects, is not pre-eminent here, for the age that expressed itself so frankly and fearlessly in the drama, seemed to lose its personality in the narrow form of the sonnet. The hand of Petrarch weighed too heavily on the sonneteer's shoulder and he wrote

"As if his whole vocation
Were endless imitation."

Aside from the influence of Petrarch, it may not be altogether fanciful to ascribe in some measure to the character of Elizabeth herself that excessive, surfeiting flattery of woman-kind which is the most persistent note in the sonnets. The queen lived on adulation and her whole life was one courtship. Suitor followed suitor—Thomas Earl of Seymour, Eric of Sweden, the Earl of Arundel, Sir William Pickering (whose friends, we are told, wagered four to one that he would marry the queen), Philip of Spain, Don Carlos, the Duc d'Anjou, the Duc d'Alençon, the Earl of Leicester—the list is by no means exhausted, and something of the court the world paid to the queen the sonneteers paid their real or imaginary mistresses.¹ Be this as it may, if the reader will open William Sharp's *Sonnets of this Century* and select at haphazard not from the greatest names, but from the lesser poets, he will see that in the variety of its emotions and in its

¹ See Martin A. S. Hume's *The Courtships of Queen Elizabeth*, London, 1896.

technique the modern sonnet bears comparison with the best sonnets of the Elizabethan age.

But we have reckoned without Shakespeare, to whom, supreme in everything he touched, it was reserved to bring to its perfection the Elizabethan sonnet, and vindicate its place in our lyric verse. In 1609 was issued *Shakespeare's sonnets*, never before imprinted. The book met with no such reception as the published plays, of which the most popular, such as *Hamlet* and *Richard the Third*, went through several impressions in Shakespeare's lifetime. The second edition of the sonnets did not appear until 1640, the third until 1709—three editions in a century. Daniel's sonnets were reprinted three times in two years; Drayton himself brought out four editions of his sonnets and they were also reprinted eight times with his other works during his lifetime. One would suppose that *Hamlet* and *Othello* would have saved the sonnets from obscurity, but as late as 1793 Steevens wrote in his edition of Shakespeare: "We have not reprinted the sonnets of Shakespeare because the strongest act of Parliament that could be framed would fail to compel readers into their service. . . . Had Shakespeare produced no other works than these, his name would have reached us with as little celebrity as time has conferred on that of Thomas Watson, an older and much more elegant sonneteer."¹ He elsewhere informs us that the sonnets are composed in the "highest strain of affectation, pedantry, circumlocution and nonsense," they are "purblind and obscure stuff"—and this from an admirer of the bard! As late as 1815 Wordsworth wrote that Steevens ventured his condemnation of the sonnets simply "because the people of England were ignorant of the treasures contained in them."² This seems incredible. During the last decade the sonnets have offered a chief point of discussion in Shakespearean study.

¹ Vol. I, p. vii.

² *Essay, supplementary to the Preface of Lyrical Ballads.*

Into the much-debated questions of their date of composition, the identity of W. H. to whom they are dedicated, or of the rival poet or the dark lady, we have not space to enter. It seems reasonable to assume that the greater part of the sonnets were composed when the other sequences were appearing, that is, before 1598, the year in which Francis Meres mentioned Shakespeare's "sugared sonnets among his private friends." Whatever their date, we must judge this sonnet collection in the light of the ones we have already discussed.

We have seen that the sonnet sequences consist largely of imitations and translations; that the poets followed each other, contented to sing the same theme with but slight variation. In the case of Shakespeare we can not point to such open borrowings from the Italian or the French as we find in Lodge, or Daniel, or Spenser, yet it has been maintained that he conformed to the fashion of the times and though many sonnets have such intensity of expression that they apparently show us the writer, they are no more a self-revelation than is Browning's *Dramatis Personæ*. Beyond dispute there is a purely conventional element in the sonnets. We have sonnets on sleep, on night, on absence from the loved one, on beauty and its power, on lust; we have the customary promise of immortality in the poet's verses; we descend to the most insipid and uninspired conceits—the dullest Petrarchian has never written poorer ones—in the debates between the heart and the eyes.¹ Though the sonnets end with two translations of a Greek epigram, their debt to the classics is a remarkably small one; we have no gods and goddesses and we escape the inevitable Prometheus. When all is said and done, when we have made every allowance for the poetic tendencies of the day which must have impressed Shakespeare who lived so intensely in his

¹Sonnets, Nos. xxiv, xlvi, xlvii. Debates between the eye and the heart go back to the troubadours.

age, these poems have a tone that absolutely differentiates them from the other collections. It is not alone their style or their thought, it is a certain personal touch. We can not but believe that the unscholarly reader who thinks he discerns in the sonnets something of the writer is nearer the truth than the critic who regards them as purely objective works of art.

Coming to the sonnets after a long reading of Italian and French sequences, we notice that Shakespeare employs new themes. From the time of Dante, sonneteers addressed their friends in praise, in counsel, in reproof, but there is nothing imitative in Shakespeare's first seventeen sonnets. Written to a young man, they all have the same theme: he must marry that his beauty may live on in a child. With an artist's instinct, Shakespeare praises his patron's beauty until we see before us some young nobleman, painted by Van Dyck with such delicacy that we take the portrait to be that of a girl. No other sequences offer parallels for the episode of the rival poet or for that series depicting the darker side of life, the theft of the poet's mistress by his friend. Such unconventional poems are not mere imitative exercises in the sonnet form. It is harder to believe that the sonnets against the "black lady" are vituperative, inserted as a foil to the "sugared" writing, than that they shadow some actual experience. If we discover in other collections sonnets that express, as do Shakespeare's, doubt and discouragement or gratitude for friendship and help, we must remember that a writer may speak sincerely in conventional phrase. In the tragic climax of her life, when Eloisa took the veil, she turned to bid Abelard farewell. Her last word was not a simple, heart-moving phrase in her mother tongue; it was a quotation from Lucan's *Pharsalia*! In Shakespeare's own day, Tichborne, facing death at the block for his conspiracy against Elizabeth, laments his end in a string of conceits:

“ My prime of youth is but a frost of cares;
My feast of joy is but a dish of pain;
My crop of corn is but a field of tares;
And all my good is but vain hope of gain;
The day is fled, and yet I saw no sun,
And now I live, and now my life is done.”¹

In the sonnets of Ronsard there is much that is purely imitative of the Italians, yet his latest and best biographer finds in these very poems unmistakable accents of personal emotion and believes that many of them have their roots deep in the poet's life. We must not rule Shakespeare's sonnets out of court because we can match phrases in them with similar ones in other writers. As Faguet has expressed it: “Un humaniste pleure sincèrement un être cher avec une réminiscence classique, comme un dévot le pleure profondément avec une citation des livres saints.”²

Though we admit that Shakespeare's sonnets do not unlock his heart, they disclose certain aspects of his mind, certain traits of character. We know that he was deeply devoted to a youth whose patronage and friendship rescued him from dejection; we learn that for a time he considered himself surpassed and supplanted in this patron's favor by a better writer; we hear him mourning his loss of caste, for while Sidney is proud of his birth and accomplishments, Shakespeare, the actor, feels that his name has received a brand and that he had made himself a motley to the view. He believes that the inheritor of heaven's graces is the man “unmovèd, cold, and to temptation slow,” and yet (the tragedy of the sonnets) he can not follow his own doctrine. Most significant of all is the fact that the supreme artist

¹ Hannah, p. 114. These verses were set to music by Mundy, Este, and Allison.

² Paul Laumonier, *Ronsard Poète Lyrique*, Paris, 1909, pp. 467-477. This is a most important passage for the interpretation of Ronsard's sonnets, and I believe it sheds light on Shakespeare's work.

in English verse felt the same bitter discouragement that overtakes the poorest craftsman. We think of a great genius as a man self-reliant and confident, conscious of his power and cheered by his work; yet there were times when Shakespeare felt that the world was bent to cross his deeds; he had no hope, no friends; he descended to such depths of discouragement that he felt shamed by his writings and actually longed for "this man's art, and that man's scope." It will be objected that these are but moods which give us no clue to the poet's philosophy of life; that we know more of Shelley from a single sonnet, *Ozymandias*, or of Wordsworth from "The world is too much with us." It is true that these glimpses are tantalizingly brief, but where else in all Shakespeare's works do we see him more clearly?

There is danger of missing the artistic import of the sonnets in discussions of their autobiographic value, as if we should spend our time endeavoring to identify the portraits in a group by Franz Hals instead of admiring the artist's technique. Looking at the workmanship of these poems we are at once struck by that gift of language and that phrasal power which is as marvellous as the delineation of character in the plays, if we may compare small things with great. In a deprecatory mood, Shakespeare declared that

"every word doth almost tell my name,
Showing their birth and where they did proceed."¹

This is true, for if the sonnets had been published anonymously, their language alone would have proved Shakespeare's authorship. His phrases are not curiously wrought out, as are the similes of the metaphysical poets, but the thought seems of itself to find perfect utterance. Many a sonneteer has written "When you are old," or "When your beauty fades," but Shakespeare writes

¹No. lxxvi.

"When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field."

It was a common regret that winter destroys the joy of summer, but the commonplace is transformed in Shakespeare's

"O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out
Against the wreckful siege of battering days."

Many a Petrarchist had declared that glory passes, but the thought becomes new in

"The painful warrior, famed for fight,
After a thousand victories once foiled,
Is from the book of honour razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toiled."¹

His creative power seems inexhaustible. He writes a sonnet urging his friend to marry and then repeats the same thought with variations for sixteen sonnets, and we feel that he could have continued indefinitely. Even when a sonnet as a whole reveals some imperfection, some weak line, it is usually redeemed by a splendid phrase; and if we take individual verses, we find here many of the treasures of the language, as when he speaks of the sun as

"Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy,"

or

"Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,"

or

"Ah, yet doth beauty, like a dial-hand,
Steal from his figure, and no pace perceived;"

or

"How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?"²

¹ Nos. ii, lxv, xxv.

² Nos. xxxiii, xviii, civ, lxv.

The range of the sonnets is equally wonderful. Keats was nourished on them, as not only his letters but his own sonnets show. There are many of Shakespeare's lines which anticipate the sweetness, the sensuousness that we associate with the work of the poet of *Endymion*:¹

"Our love was new, and then but in the Spring,
When I was wont to greet it with my lays;
As Philomel in Summer's front doth sing,
And stops her pipe in growth of riper days.
Not that the Summer is less pleasant now
Than when her mournful hymns did hush the night,
But that wild music burthens every bough,
And sweets grown common lose their dear delight."

From this passage we turn to the sonnet

"When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced
The rich-proud cost of outworn buried age;"

or to

"Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments,"

and we have a largeness of style, a firmness of expression that show us how broad an effect may be gained by fourteen lines.² The more we examine the sonnets, the more we are astonished at their variety, a quality not to be found in the other sequences of the day. We have the feeble quibbles on "Will" and "will," and the perfection of a simile in

"Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end."

¹ See his letter to Reynolds, November 22, 1817. Finch wrote Gisborne, "the poetical volume, which was the inseparable companion of Keats, and which he took for his most darling model in composition, was the *Minor Poems of Shakespeare*."

² Nos. cii, lxiv, cxvi.

When we read

“ Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war,
How to divide the conquest of thy sight;
Mine eye my heart thy picture’s sight would bar,
My heart mine eye the freedom of that right.”

we seem by the awkward, ambiguous, unmusical expression, as well as by the triviality of the conceit to be reading some poetaster of the *Cinquecento*. We turn to

“ That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang,”

and we have the mood, the subdued coloring that appeals so strongly to us to-day, the grays and the blacks, the quiet tones of a modern etching; few sonnets have more completely expressed this phase of our modern thought.¹ Antique and modern; sublime and absurd; idealistic and sensual (Hallam wished that certain of the sonnets had never seen the light); confident and weary of the world; from the very lack of uniformity in their contrasted moods, in their emotional inconsistency, these poems have the infinite variety of human character. In one of his finest moments Shakespeare wrote

“ The earth can have but earth, which is his due;
My spirit is thine, the better part of me:”

and it is that spirit, as well as the hand of the artist, that we feel in these writings. Wordsworth undoubtedly overstated the case when he asserted

“ With this same key Shakespeare unlocked his heart ”

but he was strictly within the truth when he declared that “in no part of the writings of this poet is found, in equal compass, a greater number of exquisite feelings felicitously expressed.”

¹ Nos. lx, xlvi, lxxiii.

III

We shall now retrace our steps and consider the miscellaneous lyrics of the sonneteers. Sidney has left a large number of lyrics, but unfortunately many of them are so plainly uninspired, so thoroughly artificial, that they detract from his reputation as a poet. This is the result of his Quixotic attempt to regenerate English poetry by inducing his contemporaries to abandon completely English metres for classical verse forms, a plan as impossible as the one he advocated for the English stage—the rigid observance of the three unities. Desperate diseases need desperate remedies, and when we consider the condition of English poetry as shown by such writers as Googe and Turberville we can partially understand Sidney's attitude. For a time at least this classic imitation attracted even Spenser. Gabriel Harvey of Cambridge, conceited, pedantic, without a touch of poetic ability, was the most enthusiastic member of this group; he desired it to be stated on his tombstone that he had composed hexameters in English! To write in classical metres has been an interesting pastime with our poets from Milton to Tennyson, but this was a serious undertaking, an attempt to change the whole genius of our verse. In 1579 Spenser writes to Harvey: "[Master Sidney and Master Dyer] have proclaimed in their Areopagus a general surceasing and silence of bald rhymers. . . . Instead whereof they have by authority of their whole senate prescribed certain laws and rules of quantities of English syllables for English verse . . . and drawn me to their faction. . . . I am, of late, more in love with my English versifying than with rhyming." He enclosed in this letter an example of iambic trimeter, of which the following is a fair specimen:

"If in bed, tell her that my eyes can take no rest;
If at board, tell her that my mouth can eat no meat;
If at her virginals, tell her I can hear no mirth.

Asked why? say: waking love suffereth no sleep;
 Say that raging love doth appal the weak stomach;
 Say that lamenting love marreth the musical."¹

These impossible lines (it is hard to believe that Spenser wrote them in all seriousness) Harvey gravely criticises, finding fault with the length of certain syllables, for Sidney had helped to frame some "rules and precepts of English verse." Spenser soon saw the futility of all this and the next year he is calling the English hexameter "a lame gosling that draweth one leg after her"; but Sidney was quite committed to this reform and carried it further than any of his friends. In the *Arcadia* he has given us a number of experiments in classical measures—and all are poor. The hexameter alone has met with some degree of success, partly because its rhythm is so strongly accentuated, partly because it bears a certain resemblance to our blank verse, yet neither Longfellow's *Evangeline* nor Clough's *Bothie of Tober-Na-Vuolich* has succeeded in popularizing it. In all these metrical experiments of Sidney's we do not find one good poem, anything, for example, to compare with Campion's

"Rose-cheeked Laura, come;
 Sing thou smoothly with thy beauty's
 Silent music, either other
 Sweetly gracing,"

though even this is not a masterpiece. Sidney's best known and simplest song,

"My true love hath my heart, and I have his,"

is worth all his "reformed verse."

Published with *Astrophel and Stella* are a number of songs, of which two seem to throw light on the situation depicted in certain of the sonnets, for they show Lady Rich as much

¹ R. Morris, *The Complete Works of Edmund Spenser*, London, 1886, pp. 706-707.

in love as Sidney, but restrained by a fear of the ruin that would overwhelm them both did she yield.¹ His best two lyrics appeared in the 1598 edition of his works. The first is written to "the tune of *Non credo gia che più infelice amante*," for which he also composed another unmusical song, filled with trivial conceits. Here he employs his irregular metre with skill, though the effect is a little too much that of three superimposed stanzas, rather than of an organic whole:

"The Nightingale—as soon as April bringeth
 Unto her rested sense, a perfect waking;
 While late bare earth, proud of new clothing, springeth—
 Sings out her woes, a thorn her song book making.
 And mournfully bewailing,
 Her throat in tunes expresseth
 What grief her breast oppreseth
 For Tereus' force, on her chaste will prevailing.
 O Philomela fair! O take some gladness
 That here is juster cause of plaintful sadness.
 Thine earth now springs, mine fadeth;
 Thy thorn without, my thorn my heart invadeth."

The second opens with a strain of pessimism that reminds us of Raleigh's *Lie*, though not so vigorous:

"Ring out your bells! let mourning shows be spread,
 For love is dead.
 All love is dead, infected
 With the plague of deep disdain;
 Worth as nought worth rejected,
 And fair, fair scorn doth gain.
 From so ungrateful fancy,
 From such a female frenzy,
 From them that use men thus,
 Good Lord deliver us!"

¹ Lee, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 70, 79.

It is a misfortune that the other stanzas in the poem are marred by such trivial conceits as:

“ For Love is dead.
 Sir Wrong his tomb ordaineth,
 My mistress’ marble heart;
 Which epitaph containeth
 ‘Her eyes were once his dart.’ ”¹

The sonnets are Sidney’s best lyrics.

The publication of Spenser’s *Shepherd’s Calendar* in 1579 marked a new era in English poetry. The little book is a series of pastorals, frankly artificial as nearly all pastorals are; it shows the influence of the classics, of Italian and French verse, and of Chaucer. It possessed the very qualities that English poetry lacked—spirit and feeling, a love of color and music, a sense of form. Here was the long expected “new poet”; in the midst of description or dialogue, a fresh lyric note is heard:

“ See, where she sits upon the grassy green,
 (O seemly sight!)
 Yclad in scarlet, like a maiden Queen,
 And ermines white:
 Upon her head a crimson coronet
 With damask roses and daffadillies set:
 Bay leaves between,
 And primroses green,
 Embellish the sweet violet.”²

This is written “in praise of Eliza, Queen of the Shepherds,” but we might almost take this “fourth Grace,” crowned with flowers, dancing “deffly” and singing “soote,” to be the Muse of the new lyric.

Spenser at once declares himself a musician and above all an artist. We wonder not only at the great beauty of Tus-

¹ Pp. 111, 133.

² *The Shepherd’s Calendar*, April.

can art of the Renaissance, but at the incredible number of masterpieces produced in that little duchy. After all that has been lost by fire and by plunder, in addition to the treasures preserved at Florence, we find the works of Tuscan artists in every gallery of the world. Compared with such achievement, modern art appears weak and even sterile. At this period, when all Europe felt the influence of the new art, England did not produce a single masterpiece of painting or of sculpture; the artistic genius of the nation found its expression in poetry. Carpaccio paints on the walls of San Giorgio degli Schiavoni at Venice the story of St. George and the dragon; Spenser paints it in the *Faerie Queene*. He had the artist's love for form and shading; leaving to others to depict in the lyric the conflicts of passion, he brought to English song the desire for beauty.

Spenser's *Epithalamion* was published in 1595 with the *Amoretti*; the *Prothalamion* and the four *Hymns* appeared the following year. The latter poems explain so much of his spirit that we shall consider them first.

Spenser had become a thorough-going Platonist at Cambridge, and his *Hymns* are the best exposition in English verse of the Platonic conception of Love and Beauty. To understand them we must read Plato's *Phædrus* and *Symposium*; the Latin commentary on the *Symposium* written by Marsilio Ficino, head of the Platonist academy at Florence and "the chief exponent of Platonism for the whole of the Italian Renaissance"; and Bruno's treatise *De gl' heroici furori*, written in England and published with a dedication to Sidney in 1585.¹ A study of these works will show that the first two hymns, on Love and on Beauty, have practically no originality of thought. Following Plato,

¹ See Introduction to L. Winstanley's *Edmund Spenser: The Four Hymnes*, Cambridge, 1907. Cf. J. S. Harrison, *Platonism in English Poetry of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, N. Y., 1903; J. B. Fletcher, *op. cit.*, p. 116, also *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assoc.*, September, 1911.

Spenser sings of a love that all "sordid baseness doth expell" for it is "gentle, loyal, true"—an emanation from God himself:

"For love is lord of truth and loyalty,
Lifting himself out of the lowly dust
On golden plumes up to the purest sky,
Above the reach of loathly sinful lust."¹

Our souls lived in heaven before they descended to this earth. They can remember but faintly their first abode because the "shades of the prison house begin to close" too soon around us; nevertheless they have shadowy memories of it and the thrill, the awe which we feel in the presence of beauty is our soul's recognition of the heavenly in the earthly type. Beauty, then, is a manifestation of the divine; it presents itself to our keenest sense, sight; it is the one thing on this earth that approaches the heavenly nature; and the rapture of love it inspires is simply the recognition of the divinity in man:

"Hath white and red in it such wondrous power,
That it can pierce through the eyes unto the heart,"

he asks, and bursts forth in the most famous passage in the *Hymns*:

"So every spirit, as it is most pure,
And hath in it the more of heavenly light,
So it the fairer body doth procure
To habit in, and it more fairly dight
With cheerful grace and amiable sight;
For of the soul the body form doth take,
For soul is form, and both the body make."²

Our quotations have shown that the idealism of this beauty worship is expressed with a lyric intensity; the poems are indeed "Hymns." How far removed they are from the

¹ *Hymn in honour of Love*, ll. 176-179.

² *Hymn in honour of Beauty*, ll. 71-72, 127-133.

verse essays of the eighteenth century! One can imagine how Pope would have treated the following passage in an *Essay on Love and Beauty*:

“ Sometimes upon her forehead they behold
A thousand Graces masking in delight;
Sometimes within her eye-lids they unfold
Ten thousand sweet belgards, which to their sight
Do seem like twinkling stars in frosty night.”¹

That Spenser’s conscience should have been troubled by his first two hymns is rather surprising, for nothing could be further removed from

“ Lust in the robes of Love,
The idle talk of feverish souls,”

than these poems; his Puritan conscience saved him from the paganism that pervaded so much of the Renaissance writings. However, to make amends for what he considered to be a fault, his last two hymns sing of heavenly love, Christ’s sacrifice and death. Here, in this more exalted form, we meet again the early religious lyric:

“ Begin from first, where he encradled was,
In simple cratch, wrapt in a wad of hay,
Between the toilful ox and humble ass,
And in what rags, and in how base array,
The glory of our heavenly riches lay,
When him the silly shepherds came to see,
Whom greatest princes sought on lowest knee.”²

The four hymns, interesting as they are, do not rise to the level of the marriage odes. Of these, the *Prothalamion* is the better known, for the modern reader, who shows himself impatient of lengthy descriptions in the novel or play, is wearied with the wealth of detail in the *Epithalamion*. Both poems are among the most musical pieces of writing in our

¹ Ll. 253-259.

² Hymn in honour of Heavenly Love, ll. 225-231.

literature and Spenser has not only caught the rhythm, the flow of the Italian canzone, but he has equalled its verbal melody. (Lowell says that the chief originality of Gray's *Elegy* is in the skilful use of the vowel sounds:

"The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,"

but Spenser surely knew this secret:

"Calm was the day, and through the trembling air
Sweet-breathing Zephyrus did softly play."

Each line, exquisite in itself, seems to rise or fall with the poet's thought like a wave advancing and retreating, while to this highly wrought art form is added the refrain, the device of the earlier popular song:

"Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song."

If we admire the technique of the verse, the substance equally claims our attention. We have a picture such as Botticelli might have painted: the silver swans floating down the crystal Thames; the nymphs, "all lovely daughters of the flood," each with her

"little wicker basket
Made of fine twigs, entrayled curiously,"

scattering flowers through which the birds pass along. If hitherto there had been no such music in the English lyric, there had been no such description of pure beauty. As the Florentines painted their own portraits among the kneeling saints or in the train of some prince, so Spenser draws himself unostentatiously in a few strokes. We see him, wearied with his

"long fruitless stay
In princes' court,"

walking along the shore to ease his pain.

Despite popular opinion, the *Epithalamion* is the greater

achievement. Written for his own wedding, the poem glows with the poet's happiness; its enthusiasm as much as its inherent poetic value instantly separates it from the formal and flattering epithalamia of the period. The descriptions are not over ornate for their purpose, and they are a part of the very life of the poem. All that Spenser loved is here—music from the birds, from the minstrels, from the damsels who

“dance and carol sweet”;

flowers in profusion; and the highest beauty in the bride, whose soul, he tells us, is still more fair. In his *Envoy*, Spenser regrets that he must send this song to her “in lieu of many ornaments,” but no bride ever received a gift as enduring as this “endless monument.”

Before leaving these poems it is well to notice how far removed their spirit is from our own. Our eyes have been trained to see the shadows; Nature no longer sings a song of pure joy, for with Shelley we hear the winds

“Moan for the world's wrong.”¹

What a contrast between Spenser's London with its clear river and its flower gardens, and the city seen by a modern poet:

“I see the loafer-burnished wall;
I hear the rotting match-girl whine;
I see the unslept switchman fall;
I hear the explosion in the mine;
I see along the heedless street
The sandwichmen trudge through the mire;
I hear the tired, quick tripping feet
Of sad, gay girls who ply for hire.”¹

The beauty we see or dream eludes us; we never reach it, for our aim exceeds our grasp. We feel in its presence not

¹ John Davidson, *St. George's Day in Fleet Street Eclogues*, second series.

the joy of Spenser, but a certain discouragement, a certain pathos, for to us beauty is brief lived; it fades and passes, but for Spenser beauty was something to be seized as one might gather flowers by the handfuls. It was near him everywhere; he had only to stretch forth his hand. So with spiritual beauty, for the Platonists believed that the soul may be disciplined until it actually beholds before it Wisdom and Truth embodied. The art of these wedding odes is all the more admirable because it is a lost one.

Apart from his sonnets Drayton has left a considerable number of odes, but they form a very small portion of his work compared with his *Heroical Epistles*, *Barons' Wars*, and *Polyolbion* (Mr. Bullen estimates that he has written sixty thousand lines of poetry). The lyric impulse was not strong in him, and he preferred narrative or descriptive verse. He published, in 1606, *Poems Lyric and Pastoral*, in which are found his *Odes*. He asks himself why he may not

"Th' old lyric kind revive,"

but his odes are not the larger type of the lyric which we generally associate with that title. They have nothing of the ampler music of Spenser's *Hymns*, but are rather Horatian in spirit, if not in style. Drayton tells us that in writing them a poet must have a quick invention, and a nimble rhyme; we see his conception of an ode in his *Virginian Voyage* which tells of a marvellous land that produces

"Without your toil,
Three harvests more,
All greater than your wish."

where grows

"The cedar reaching high
To kiss the sky,
The cypress, pine
And useful sassafras."

He does not forget that the laurel is found there:

“Apollo’s sacred tree,
You may it see,
A poet’s brows
To crown, that may sing there.”¹

Unfortunately for his prophecy, the poetic laurel is not conspicuously worn in America.

Of the other lyrics, *To His Coy Love* has that easy, *dégagé* air which we noted in some of his sonnets, while the *Shepherd’s Sirena*, though too long, has an unusually attractive lilt and is worth whole books of the *Polyolbion*. Apart from his finest sonnet, Drayton’s greatest lyrical achievement is his ballad of *Agincourt*. He composed this with the utmost care, making many revisions to good advantage, for certainly it is the most stirring war song written in that martial age:

“Fair stood the wind for France,
When we our sails advance,
Nor now to prove our chance,
Longer will tarry;
But putting to the main,
At Caux, the mouth of Seine,
With all his martial train
Landed King Harry.”

It has all the swiftness of the old ballads and we have nothing to equal its *gaudia certaminis* until we come to Scott. The spirit never flags from the opening lines to the closing appeal of the last stanza:

“O when shall English men
With such acts fill a pen,
Or England breed again
Such a King Harry?”²

¹ C. Brett, *Minor Poems of Michael Drayton*, Oxford, 1907, pp. 71-72.

² P. 81.

It is curious that Drayton, who never trailed a pike in the army and whose Muse was as gentle as his own nature, should have caught, better than any of his contemporaries in the lyric, the martial fervor.

There is less of the song element in Daniel than in Drayton. His lyrics have the smoothness and melody which we found in his sonnets, but there is no personality or force in them. He uses irregular metres skillfully and his lines on the "happy golden age" have something of Spenser's style.¹ In his plays and masques he has introduced a few choruses and songs, but they are uninteresting; they lack quality; the lyrics do not overflow naturally as they do in the masques of the period. Only one song (strangely entitled a chorus) in *Hymen's Triumph* is worthy of the Elizabethan lyric, and unfortunately Daniel nowhere else repeats this note:

" Love is a sickness full of woes,
 All remedies refusing:
 A plant that with most cutting grows,
 Most barren with best using.
 Why so?
 More we enjoy it, more it dies;
 If not enjoyed, it sighing cries,
 Hey ho!"²

Thomas Lodge, in his prose romances, *Rosalynde*, 1590, and *Margarite of America*, 1596, introduces, as was the custom of the age, a number of lyrics. Two of these, both in *Rosalynde*, are among the best of the period, and are Lodge's chief claim for remembrance as a poet. In *Rosalynde* we have the beauty worship, the sensuousness of Renaissance art, expressed in the most musical verse that Lodge has written:

¹ See A. B. Grosart, *The Complete Works of Samuel Daniel*, London, 1885-1896, vol. I, p. 260.

² Vol. III, p. 349.

“ Like to the clear in highest sphere
Where all imperial glory shines,
Of selfsame colour is her hair
Whether unfolded or in twines:

Heigh ho, fair Rosalynde!
Her eyes are sapphires set in snow,
Refining heaven by every wink;
The gods do fear whenas they glow,
And I do tremble when I think:

Heigh ho, would she were mine!”

Here is a canvas glowing with light. The other song is more restrained in its description but is equally melodic:

“ Love in my bosom like a bee
Doth suck his sweet:
Now with his wings he plays with me,
Now with his feet.
Within mine eyes he makes his nest,
His bed amidst my tender breast,
My kisses are his daily feast;
And yet he robs me of my rest:
Ah! wanton, will ye!”¹

Many of Lodge's songs have been traced to foreign sources; he tells us himself that some of the lyrics in the *Margarite of America* are taken from Pascale, Dolce, Martelli, Desportes, and it is quite possible these songs may not be entirely his own composition.

With the exception of Shakespeare, whose lyrics we shall consider with those of the dramatists, we have examined the lyrics of the sonneteers. We have by no means exhausted the list of lyric writers, but before coming to the lyrics of the drama and the song books, we have space to consider but

¹ *Complete Works of Thomas Lodge, Hunterian Club, Glasgow, 1883, vol. I, pp. 64, 11.* The best of Lodge's lyrics have been reprinted in A. H. Bullen's *Lyrics from the Elizabethan Romances*, London, 1890.

three more poets—Breton, Southwell and Raleigh, and we could hardly choose three men more radically different in their characters. Nicholas Breton (1545?-1626?), the stepson of Gascoigne, lived by his pen. He was a fluent, graceful writer, both of verse and prose, but he was diffuse. He wrote too much, for while he has “a pretty flowery and pastoral gale of fancy,” to quote Phillips’s unsympathetic criticism of Herrick, there is little thought or deep feeling in his poetry. He is a skillful metrist, using the octosyllabic couplet well, and parts of his *Passionate Shepherd* (1604) remind us of the nature descriptions in *L’Allegro*. A typical song is his madrigal which won the favor of Elizabeth. It begins

“ In the merry month of May,
 In a morn by break of day,
 Forth I walked by the wood side,
 Whenas May was in his pride:
 There I spyed all alone,
 Phillida and Corydon.
 Much ado there was, God wot!
 He would love, and she would not.”¹

“On Wednesday morning about nine o’clock, as her Majesty opened the casement of her gallery window, there were three excellent musicians, who being disguised in ancient country attire, did greet her with a pleasant song of *Corydon and Phillida*, made in three parts of purpose. The song, as well for the worth of the ditty as the aptness of the note thereto applied, it pleased Her Highness after it had been once sung to command again, and highly to grace it with her cheerful acceptance and commendation. It was entitled *The Plowman’s Song* ‘in the merry month of May.’”² Breton’s fame

¹ See A. B. Grosart, *Works of Nicholas Breton*, London, 1879, vol. I, t. p. 7. Bullen, *op. cit.*, reprints a number of Breton’s lyrics.

² T. Oliphant, *La Musa Madrigalesca*, London, 1837, p. 204.

may rest on the lullaby in his *Arbour of Amorous Devices* (1597), a song of a deserted mother quieting the

“Poor soul that thinks no creature harm.”

The pathos is sincere and not overemphasized; the whole poem is worthy of Blake at his best:

“And dost thou smile? O, thy sweet face!
 Would God himself he might thee see!
 No doubt thou wouldst soon purchase grace,
 I know right well, for thee and me:
 But come to mother, babe, and play,
 For father false is fled away.”

One of the most affecting touches is the mother's pride in the man who has left her:

“Thy father is no rascal lad,
 A noble youth of blood and bone:
 His glancing looks, if he once smile,
 Right honest women may beguile.”¹

The poems of Robert Southwell (1561?-1595), the Jesuit martyr, were published posthumously the year of his execution at Tyburn. That he had intended to print them is shown by his preface and they were undoubtedly put in order and partly composed during his three years' imprisonment.² They thus possess a melancholy interest and it is hardly surprising that critics have allowed their sympathy for the man to bias their judgment of his poetry.

Southwell is the one religious poet of the age. Nearly all the lyrists (Breton, for example, whom we have just considered) wrote religious songs or paraphrases, but Southwell's whole body of verse is religious, written partly in protest against the love poems of the day. In his preface he

¹ Grosart, *Breton*, vol. I, d. p. 7.

² A. B. Grosart, *Complete Poems of Robert Southwell*, London, 1872, Introduction.

regrets that poetry has been degraded by the amorists, and appearing at the time of the sonnet sequences, these lines sound strangely :

“ O women ! woe to men ; traps for their falls ;
 Still actors in all tragical mischances ;
 Earth's necessary evils, captivating thralls,
 Now murdering with your tongues, now with your glances ;
 Parents of life and love, spoilers of both ;
 The thieves of hearts ; false, do you love or loathe.”¹

Thus, in *Love's servile lot*, he writes of Love's mistress :

“ A honey shower rains from her lips,
 Sweet lights shine in her face ;
 She hath the blush of virgin mind,
 The mind of viper's race.

“ May never was the month of love,
 For May is full of flowers ;
 But rather April, wet by kind, (nature)
 For love is full of showers.

“ Plow not the seas, sow not the sands,
 Leave off your idle pain ;
 Seek other mistress for your minds,
 Love's service is in vain.”²

Though he dislikes the substance of the sonneteers, he imitates their manner, and no Petrarchist has ever given us more extravagant conceits than has Southwell in describing the eyes of Christ. He compares them to sweet volumes, nectared ambrys (larders for alms) of soul-feeding meats, quivers of love darts, blazing comets, living mirrors, pools of Hesebon, turtle-twins, and Bethlehem-cisterns.³ Crashaw,

¹ P. 24.

² Pp. 78-81.

³ From *St. Peter's Complaint*, as is the following stanza (cxxi).

in his descriptions of the Magdalene's eyes, could not outdo this. His lines on sleep have a familiar ring:

' Sleep, death's ally, oblivion of tears,
 Silence of passions, balm of angry sore,
 Suspense of loves, security of fears,
 Wrath's lenitive, heart's ease, storm's calmest shore;
 Senses' and souls' reprieve from all cumbers,
 Benumbing sense of ill, with quiet slumbers."

The best poems of Southwell are the songs on the Nativity and those which describe his own feelings—his longing for death. Jonson, not an easy critic to please, was delighted with Southwell's *Burning Babe*, and *A Child my choice* or *New Prince, new Pomp* is nearly as good. In his personal poems we at last hear a man's own voice. The homely objects, the simple style of the following stanza are extremely effective and form a sharp contrast to his conceits:

" The gown which I do use to wear,
 The knife wherewith I cut my meat,
 And eke that old and ancient chair
 Which is my only usual seat:
 All these do tell me I must die,
 And yet my life amend not I."¹

His poem *I die alive* is not a masterpiece of poetic expression but it possesses what so much of the smooth writing of the age lacked—sincerity, for it is the cry of a man, worn out by imprisonment and torture:

" O life! what lets thee from a quick decease?
 O death! what draws thee from a present prey?
 My feast is done, my soul would be at ease,
 My grace is said; O death, come take away."²

¹ P. 156, *Upon the image of Death*.

² P. 84.

The poems of Sir Walter Raleigh (1552?-1618) contain some of the strongest writing of the age. As befitted his nature, he is at his best in the short, vigorous expression of stirring emotion. His most characteristic work is rough-hewn and lacks grace, but it possesses individuality and character. He could write in the flowing song style of the day

"Conceit begotten by the eyes,
Is quickly born and quickly dies;"

he composed the best commendatory sonnet for the *Faerie Queene*, which critic after critic believes inspired Milton's

"Methought I saw my late espoused saint"

merely because the first three words in each sonnet are the same; and he could write love songs in which an engaging directness of diction takes the place of sonneteering compliment:

"Silence in love bewrays more woe
Than words, though ne'er so witty:
A beggar that is dumb, you know,
May challenge double pity."¹

Two of his lyrics are remarkable; they are as distinctly original as Donne's, though different in quality. In the *Lie*, the most pessimistic lyric of the age, Raleigh bitterly arraigns the times; all about him is rotten to the core; church and state, court and college, high and low, all is corruption. It is the mood of Hamlet expressed with the intensity of Hotspur:

"Say to the court, it glows
And shines like rotten wood;
Say to the church, it shows
What's good and doth no good:
If church and court reply,
Then give them both the lie.

¹ Hannah, *op. cit.*, pp. 22, 8, 21.

“ Tell fortune of her blindness;
Tell nature of decay;
Tell friendship of unkindness;
Tell justice of delay;
And if they will reply,
Then give them all the lie!”¹

It is small wonder that such a poem called forth numerous rejoinders and imitations. Raleigh returns to the charge in his *Give me my scallop-shell of quiet*, where he writes of

“ heaven’s bribeless hall,
Where no corrupted voices brawl;
No conscience molten into gold,
No forged accuser bought or sold,
No cause deferred, no vain-spent journey,
For there Christ is the king’s attorney,
Who pleads for all without degrees,
And he hath angels, but no fees.”²

Whether or not his dirge of eight lines,

“ Even such is Time, that takes in trust
Our youth, our joys, our all we have,”

was composed, as a tradition runs, the night before his execution, he wrote it when he knew that the end of his imprisonment was “the dark and silent grave,” and for pure pathos, it has few equals.

Many of the lyrics which we have quoted appeared in the various Miscellanies of the period and we must briefly review these successors to *Tottel’s Miscellany*. It will be remembered that Tottel published his book in 1557; and it was not until 1576 that a new anthology appeared, the *Paradise of Dainty Devices*. In the dedication of this collection of songs, we are informed that the “ditties” are “both pithy and pleas-

¹ P. 24. The poem first appears in MS. Harl. 6910, circ. 1596.

² P. 28.

ant, as well for the invention as metre, and will yield a far greater delight, being as they are so aptly made to be set to any song in five parts, or sung to instrument." The title rightly declares that the book contains "pithy precepts, learned counsels," for of the ninety-eight poems it offers, forty-three may be classed as admonitory verse. There is little to be said for these poems, except that the age evidently took as much delight in them as Georgian readers did in the epigrams of Pope. Polonius' speech of advice to Laertes in the first act of *Hamlet* is utterly inconsistent with his character, but it contained precisely the precepts that this generation enjoyed. It is curious to see these moral effusions masquerading as songs. The following excerpt is from "a worthy ditty sung before the Queen's Majesty at Bristowe":

"Mistrust not troth, that truly means, for every jealous freak;
 Instead of wrong, condemn not right, no hidden wrath to
 wreak:
 Look on the light of faultless life, how bright her virtues
 shine,
 And measure out her steps each one, by level and by line."¹

Of this whole collection only two songs, both by Richard Edwards, have survived. The first, "Where griping grief the heart would wound," is remembered because it is quoted by Peter in *Romeo and Juliet*; the second, *Amantium Iræ*,

"In going to my naked bed as one that would have slept,
 I heard a wife sing to her child, that long before had wept;"

has a naïveté of expression, not without charm, that has won for it a place in many modern anthologies.²

Of the ninety poems that compose the *Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions* (1578), the greater part are any-

¹ See J. P. Collier's reprint, London, 1866, p. 44.

² Pp. 89, 73.

mous. Fully one third of the poems are moral admonitions and many of the titles, such as "The Lover describeth his painful plight," or "The Lover in great distress comforteth himself with hope," are reminiscent of Tottel. The *Paradise of Dainty Devices* contained no sonnets, but there are three here, all mediocre. The collection is dreary reading; but one song from it—the Willow song of Desdemona—has survived, and it is only occasionally that we come across such a lyric outburst as *A proper Ditty. To the tune of Lusty Gallant*:

"The glittering shows of Flora's dames
Delights not so my carefull mind,
Ne gathering of the fragrant flames,
That oft in Flora's nymphs I find.
Ne all the notes of birds so shrill,
Melodiously in woods that sing,
Whose solemn quires the skies doth fill,
With note on note that heavenly ring."¹

The songs in the *Handful of Pleasant Delights* (1584) are mostly anonymous and when they are ascribed to authors, the names are not those that suggest immortal verse—"P. Picks," "L. Gibson," or "a student in Cambridge." The songs are written for certain tunes—"Green Sleeves," "All in a garden fair," "The merchant's daughter went over the fields," or "To any pleasant tune," and while they have an easy flowing metre, their poetic worth is small. It is probable that Shakespeare had one song in mind, *A Nosegay*, with its "Lavender is for lovers true, Rosemary is for remembrance, Violet is for faithfulness," when he wrote Ophelia's flower scene in *Hamlet*.²

The Phoenix Nest (1593) included poems by Raleigh, Breton, and Lodge, the last named contributing fifteen writ-

¹ Collier's Reprint, London, 1866, p. 36.

² See Arber's reprint in the *English Scholar's Library*, No. 3, London, 1878, p. 3.

ten in fourteen different metres. There are fourteen sonnets, all but five on the pains of love, of which the best, *Those eyes that set my fancy on a fire*, is written with much spirit and fervor:

“O eyes that pierce our hearts without remorse,
O hairs of right that wear a royal crown,
O hands that conquer more than Cæsar’s force,
O wit that turns huge kingdoms upside down!”

but as a whole the lyrics in this collection lack life. At their best they have artistic touches in phrasing or description, and their metrical charm is much more evident than any sincerity of thought or feeling. There is a night piece which is strikingly modern in its tone:

“Let sailors gaze on stars and moon so freshly shining,
Let them that miss the way be guided by the light,
I know my lady’s bower, there needs no more divining,
Affection sees in dark, and Love hath eyes by night,”

while the following well deserves to be remembered:

“Sweet violets, Love’s paradise, that spread
Your gracious odours which you couched bear
Within your pale faces,
Upon the gentle wing of some calm breathing wind,
That plays amidst the plain,
If by the favour of propitious stars you gain
Such grace, as in my lady’s bosom place to find,
Be proud to touch those places;
And when her warmth your moisture forth doth wear,
Whereby your dainty parts are sweetly fed,
Your honours of the flowery meads I pray,
You pretty daughters of the earth and sun,
With mild and seemly breathing straight display
My bitter sighs that have my heart undone.”¹

¹ See Collier’s reprint, London, 1866, pp. 89, 120, 121. “Sweet violets” appears again in *England’s Helicon*.

Of all the miscellanies, *England's Helicon* (1600) contains the finest poetry.¹ It is a collection of pastorals and lyrics by the best writers of the day, Watson, Sidney, Spenser, Drayton, Lodge, and Breton, but it contains little new material and the book calls for no further comment. The selections have been made with discrimination, though for our modern taste there is too much of the pastoral and we tire of listening to the complaints of Tityrus and Thestylis, Corydon and Corin.

The last of the Elizabethan Miscellanies, Francis Davison's *Poetical Rhapsody*, appeared in 1602.² Although it contains Raleigh's *Lie* and a series of sonnets by Watson, the collection has few lyrics; a great number of the poems are by unknown writers and are not in any way remarkable. In its pastorals, in its translations from the Italian, the book is thoroughly typical of the age; in poetic value, it is much inferior to *England's Helicon*. It includes, however, a number of lyrics by a writer we have but mentioned—Thomas Campion—reminding us that we have yet to consider the very flower of Elizabethan song, the lyrics in the drama and in the song books.

IV

The miracle plays, the moralities and interludes, were still witnessed in the early years of Elizabeth's reign. From them the Elizabethans inherited not only the "law of liberty"—freedom from the unities of the classic stage—but equally important, the tradition of song in the drama. The first playwrights did not emphasize this song element. Robert Greene (1560?-1592) has but one song in his five plays; for his lyrics, we must read his prose tracts and romances. His style was singularly sweet and plaintive;

¹ See the reprint edited by A. H. Bullen, London, 1899.

² See Bullen's reprint, London, 1890.

his wild life and his death in poverty and disgrace are in sharp contrast to the peaceful note of his lyrics which are marked not by outbursts of feeling, but by grace and delicacy:

“ Ah, what is love? It is a pretty thing,
As sweet unto a shepherd as a king;
And sweeter too.”

Read in the light of his restless career, there is the very essence of tragic contrast in his song “Sweet are the thoughts that savour of content.”

“ The homely house that harbours quiet rest;
The cottage that affords no pride nor care;
The mean that ’grees with country music best;
The sweet consort of mirth and music’s fare;
Obscured life sets down a type of bliss:
A mind content both crown and kingdom is.”

His two best lyrics are his sonnet “Ah were she pitiful as she is fair,” which Martin Person set to music, and Sephestia’s song to her child, a counterpart to Breton’s lullaby, with its refrain:

“ Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee;
When thou art old there’s grief enough for thee.”¹

George Peele (1558?-1597) introduces lyrics freely in his dramatic compositions. *David and Bethsabe* opens with singing; there are many snatches of song in his *Old Wives Tale*; in his *Arraignement of Paris* we have a Latin song, an Italian song, and the gay duet, “Fair and fair, and twice so fair.” “His golden locks Time hath to silver turned,” the lyric which Thackeray admired, is certainly his best one. It was sung when Sir Henry Lea, master of the armory, bore

¹ A. H. Bullen, *Poems, chiefly lyrical from Romances and Prose Tracts of the Elizabethan Age*, London, 1890, pp. 22, 33, 15.

arms for the last time in the yearly joust he had instituted in the Queen's honor.¹ As she sat in the royal pavilion she heard strains of music, "accompanied with these verses, pronounced and sung by M. Hales her Majesty's servant, a gentleman in that art excellent and for his voice both commendable and admirable":

" My helmet now shall make a hive for bees,
And lovers' sonnets turned to holy psalms,
A man-at-arms must now serve on his knees,
And feed on prayers, which are old age his alms:
But though from court to cottage he depart,
His saint is sure of his unspotted heart."

Could a lyric have a better setting?

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), whose genius transformed the drama, contented himself with splendid lyrical passages in dialogue and soliloquy and did not introduce formal songs in his plays. His one song is the most perfect expression of that pastoral ideal which fascinated the age; it is small wonder that "Come live with me and be my love" had its numerous rejoinders and imitations. There is the spirit and music of many song books in the four lines:

" Where we will sit upon the rocks,
And see the shepherds feed their flocks
By shallow rivers, to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals."²

The most notable series of dramatic lyrics by this first group of playwrights appeared in *Summer's Last Will and*

¹ The full account is in Segar's *Honour, Military and Civil*, Bk. III, chapter liv, cited by A. Dyce in his *Works of Greene and Peele*, London, 1861, p. 566. As usually printed, the song is in the third person.

² J. H. Ingram, *Christopher Marlowe and his Associates*, London, 1904, p. 221. There are several versions of this song.

Testament by Thomas Nashe (1567-1601). These songs make us regret the energy Nashe consumed in his unreadable controversies; they will outlive all his prose. Their range is remarkable. The opening song by Ver who enters "with his train, overlaid with suits of green moss, representing short grass," has all the happy artlessness of the early folk lyrics:

"The fields breathe sweet, the daisies kiss our feet,
Young lovers meet, old wives a-sunning sit;
In every street, these tunes our ears do greet—
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!
Spring, the sweet Spring!"

but when Summer, who

"terms himself the god of poetry,
And setteth wanton songs unto the lute,"

feels his end at hand and cries:

"Sing me some doleful ditty to the lute,
That may complain my near approaching death,"

we hear a lament which is the cry of hopeless grief:

"Beauty is but a flower
Which wrinkles will devour,
Brightness falls from the air;
Queens have died young and fair;
Dust hath closed Helen's eye.
I am sick, I must die:
Lord, have mercy upon us."

This is the very essence of melancholy; each line is a dirge; to affect the mind the sorrows of the past are added to the utter desolation of the present. We can imagine the effect

of such a song, produced when the plague was ravaging London:

“Strength stoops unto the grave,
Worms feed on Hector brave.
Swords may not fight with fate,
Earth still holds ope her gate.
Come, Come, the bells do cry.
I am sick, I must die:
Lord, have mercy upon us.”

Nashe could employ to perfection a long, slow, melancholy line:

“Go not yet hence, bright soul of the sad year;
The earth is hell, when thou leav'st to appear.”

or

“Short days, sharp days, long nights come on apace,
Ah, who will hide us from the winter's face?
Cold doth increase, the sickness will not cease,
And here we lie, God knows, with little ease:
From winter, plague, and pestilence,
Good Lord, deliver us.”¹

One does not question the sincerity of such writing.

We have now come to the heyday of the drama and it would be far too great a task to consider not the individual lyrics, but even the lyric mood of each playwright. Songs are scattered lavishly through comedy and tragedy alike; if at times we find a play without a single bar of melody, on the other hand one character alone in Heywood's *Rape of Lucrece* has eighteen lyrics! Song has departed from the drama as it has very largely from our lives. In a modern comedy the heroine may seat herself at the piano, strike a few chords, and sing a line or two, but it is done merely

¹ R. B. McKerrow, *Works of Thomas Nashe*, London, 1904, vol. III, pp. 238, 283, 237, 292.

to give an air of reality to the play. Probably it is a blessing that our actors do not attempt to sing; but in Elizabethan times the boy actors were often members of church choirs and thus the dramatist had at his command well-trained voices. Two great companies, the "boys of Paul's" and "children of the Queen's chapel" were composed entirely of choir boys and were trained by choir conductors. Moreover, the audiences, whose influence on dramatic composition is all-powerful, were brought up on the song books and were eager to hear new lyrics. When we lament the utter absence of the lyric in our modern plays we must remember that in Shakespeare's day the conditions were ideal for the development of song.

In that refuge of weak intellects, the musical comedy, there are found what the play-bills generously entitle "lyrics," but they are usually destitute of any literary value and at their best show merely a clever, nimble metre. The lyrics we are considering are the perfection of art.¹ We frequently wonder whether a Shakespearean audience appreciated the beauty of the blank verse they heard, for very few of our actors understand it. These songs show a more elusive style in the refinements of metre. We have lost the musical setting for most of them; yet no matter how lovely were the melodies, they could not have surpassed the music of the words. The variety of the lyrics is noteworthy; we turn from the charming artificiality of the songs attributed to Lyly, such as:

"Cupid and my Campaspe played
At cards for kisses—Cupid paid;"

¹ For the lyrics that follow see R. Bell's *Songs from the Dramatists*, A. H. Bullen's *Lyrics from the Dramatists of the Elizabethan Age*, London, 1892, and that best of modern anthologies, indispensable for a study of the lyric, the *Oxford Book of English Verse*. For the music of these lyrics see *An Historical Sketch of the History of Dramatic Music in England*, in E. F. Rimbault's edition of Purcell's *Bonduca*, London, 1842.

to that sturdy song of Thomas Heywood's with its enthusiasm, its exultation of a spring mood:

“Pack, clouds, away! and welcome, day!
With night we banish sorrow.”

or to Dekker's equally effective

“Haymakers, rakers, reapers, and mowers,
Wait on your summer-queen;
Dress up with musk-rose her eglantine bowers,
Daffodils strew the green.”

The flower songs are a small anthology in themselves; they tell of the joys of life, as in Fletcher's superb

“Now the lusty Spring is seen;
Golden yellow, gaudy blue,
Daintily invite the view;”

they adorn the brows of beauty, they deck the graves of unhappy lovers:

“Lay a garland on my hearse
Of the dismal yew;
Maidens, willow branches bear;
Say, I died true.”

We hear an echo of the old drinking songs in Dekker's “Trowl the bowl, the jolly nut-brown bowl,” or in Shakespeare's “And let me the canakin clink, clink;” we have the sublimation of the old moral, sententious song in Dekker's “Art thou poor, yet hast thou golden slumbers?” Love, nature, and grief are the main motives of these lyrics and with such themes the variety of the songs may be understood. The love songs range from compliment to passion; the nature

lyrics depict "All the flowers of the Spring" and re-echo the call of every bird; the elegies turn from the graceful melancholy of

"Weep no more, nor sign, nor groan,
Sorrow calls no time that's gone:
Violets plucked, the sweetest rain
Makes not fresh nor grow again;"

to the blank despair of Webster's "Call for the robin-red-breast and the wren."

It would be a most interesting study to observe at what points in the plays these lyrics are introduced. If they frequently appear to be interpolated at random, more often they plainly intensify the dramatic situation; in many a scene they are a part of the very warp and woof of the plot. In losing the lyric from the drama, not only has our poetry been impoverished but the resources of the playwright have been distinctly weakened.

The songs of Shakespeare are by no means an epitome of these lyrics; he has nothing, for example, to equal Fletcher's praise of Melancholy, which might have been sung by Jacques:

"Hence, all you vain delights,
As short as are the nights
Wherein you spend your folly!
There's naught in this life sweet,
If men were wise to see't,
But only melancholy,
Oh, sweetest melancholy!"

yet it is true beyond a doubt that in Shakespeare's lyrics this form of poetry found its most perfect expression. Within this small field of verse, he moves as freely and as commandingly as in the plays whose province is as wide as humanity itself. With his fondness for music, repeatedly

expressed, he has caught all tones; the homely, half-humorous realism of the folk songs:

“ When all aloud the wind doth blow,
 And coughing drowns the parson’s saw,
And birds sit brooding in the snow,
 And Marian’s nose looks red and raw,
When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
 Tu-whit!
 Tu-who!—a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.”

the Platonic idealism in

“ Who is Silvia? What is she,
 That all our swains commend her?
Holy, fair, and wise is she;
 The heaven such grace did lend her,
That she might admired be.”

There is the simplicity of the early songs in “O mistress mine, where are you roaming,” or “It was a lover and his lass”; there is the delicacy, the refinement of the art lyric in the strophe “Come unto these yellow sands” or “Over hill, over dale.” We have heard so many times “Under the greenwood tree,” and “Blow, blow thou winter wind” that these “sweets grown common lose their dear delight,” but how marvellously the moral platitudes of the earlier miscellanies have been transformed in

“ Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
 That dost not bite so nigh
 As benefits forgot:
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
 As friend remembered not.”

The style of these songs is as varied as their content, and the metres range from

“Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more;
Men were deceivers ever;
One foot in sea and one on shore,
To one thing constant never:”

to the magic music of “Full fathom five thy father lies.” Shakespeare gains his effects in such little space; eight lines suffice for the most passionate of all his songs, “Take, O take those lips away,” and there is the essence of all spring songs and serenades in the single stanza “Hark! hark! the lark at heaven’s gate sings.”¹ It is small wonder that Hugo and the French romanticists, turning to Shakespeare’s example in their fight against the classic drama, imitated his method of introducing lyrics in his plays as they did his mingling of tragedy and comedy; yet no one has been able to imitate his style. We catch strains of the long-drawn-out sweetness of Spenser’s *Epithalamion* in Tennyson’s *Lotos-Eaters*; the vigor, the mordant tone of Raleigh’s *Lie* may be found in our modern songs and ballads; the sensuousness of the Elizabethan sonnet has been caught by Keats, but Shakespeare’s songs have no counterpart in all the verse that has been written since his day. As we read them, we seem to see above them that line of John Donne’s

“The mystery, the sign you must not touch.”

V

We have said that the audiences in the theatres demanded songs because all classes of society delighted in singing

¹ “His songs possess in perfection all the essential elements of gaiety and tenderness, facility and grace, idiomatic purity, melody in the expression, variety, suddenness, and completeness. In their airiness and sweetness, their spontaneity and full-throated ease, they resemble the song of birds.” Bell, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110.

them; we find the confirmation of this statement in the *Stationers' Register*. In 1530 Wynkyn de Worde published his song book, of which only the part for the bass has been preserved. No other book with music appeared until 1571, when there was published *Songs of three, four, and five voices, composed and made by Thomas Whythorne*, which we may dismiss with the comment that the music is mediocre and the verses are doggerel.¹ From 1587 to 1630 there were published eighty-eight song books containing between fifteen hundred and two thousand pieces.

The first Elizabethan song books were directly inspired by the Italian madrigal collections, for Italy was the acknowledged home of song. In the *Cortegiano*, a work which both Italians and Englishmen regarded as a classic, we read: "Signori, . . . avete a sapere ch' io non mi contento del Cortegiano, se egli non è ancor musico, e se, oltre allo intendere ed esser sicuro a libro, non sa di varii instrumenti."² To understand music, to play or to sing, was a necessary accomplishment for a gentleman. This produced an army of composers, who set to melodies the sonnets of Petrarch and his followers and the *strambotti* of Serafino. The favorite poetic form for these song writers was not the sonnet however but the madrigal. Petrarch had written a small number of them, but the Neapolitan Dragonetto Bonifacio (1500-1529) was the first poet to gain fame in this *genre*. Luigi Cassola, considered by many the best of all madrigal writers, published in 1545 a collection of over three hundred, without music; other well-known names are Muzio Manfredi, Guarini, and the two Strozzi who wrote over fifteen hundred. To show the tone of the Italian madrigal we shall quote one by Cassola:

¹ See the quotations in E. F. Rimbault's article in *The Bibliographical Miscellany*, No. 4, London, 1854.

² Book I, chapter xlvii.

"Quando più guardo le bellezze estreme,
 E quelle gratie rare,
 Ch'in la mia donna sola
 Fur per gratia del ciel raccolte insieme:
 Alhor più penso come mai parola
 Possa d'altra parlare,
 E ch'in altra il pensier possa pensare:
 Che nel mirar sotto il suo bianco velo
 Veggio quanto può far natura, e il cielo."¹

(The more I see the highest beauties and those rare graces which by the grace of Heaven were united in my lady alone, the more I wonder how words can speak of any other, or the thought dwell on any one else; because looking beneath her white veil, I see all that nature, all that Heaven can do.)

Here is graceful flattery, the characteristic trait of these madrigals, for they do not, so often as the sonnets, affect a high and passionate strain. In other respects their subject-matter is similar; they sing of pastoral life, of beauty and its brief moment, of love with its many sorrows. Precisely as we have elegiac and religious sonnets, so we have madrigals written on the death of friends, madrigals that are prayers to Christ or the Virgin. In technique the sonnet and madrigal do not approach each other; the madrigal form was not a fixed one either in its rhyme scheme or in the number of its verses. "The madrigal," writes Crescimbeni, "is the shortest lyrical composition used by good writers. . . . In regard to the number of its lines, the earliest fathers of song did not use less than six nor more than eleven," yet Cassola has madrigals with as many as twenty-four lines.² The music of the madrigal followed an invariable tradition. Madrigals were unaccompanied part songs, frequently written for as many as five or six voices; each part was carried

¹ See the 1545 edition of Cassola's madrigals, p. 91.

² *L'Istoria della Volgar Poesia*, 3d edition, Venezia, 1731, vol. I, p. 184.

by but a single performer and not, as we arrange them to-day, by several singers. The music was a "combination of two elements originally totally separate, the contrapuntal secular music of the Italians and their resident masters of Netherlandish blood, and the harmonic Italian quasi-popular song. . . . All the English madrigal-writers show both the contrapuntal and the harmonic elements in their works, and indeed generally combine them in the same composition. . . . Even in the subsidiary form of madrigals known as Ballets or Fa Las, where the markedly rhythmical element is especially prominent, and the whole tendency is in the direction of plainly melodic swing, there is still an attention to the delicate shades of individual part-writing which, even if there were not (as there usually are) occasional contrapuntal passages, would prevent us from regarding them merely as harmonized tunes."¹

The first books of the new madrigal music were William Byrd's *Psalms, Sonnets and Songs of Sadness and Piety* (thirty-five in number), published in 1588, and Nicholas Yonge's *Musica Transalpina. Madrigals translated, of four, five and six parts, chosen out of divers excellent authors*, which appeared the same year, bringing into England, for the first time, the term "madrigal." Fifty-seven Italian and Netherlandish composers are represented in this collection, and the Italian poetry which accompanied their music has been clumsily translated into English. The success of these two books started a whole school of madrigal composition; we at once have English composers and English madrigal writers, although many Italian madrigals, translated or adapted, were constantly appearing side by side with original verse. The next step was to introduce musical accompaniment and in John Dowland's *First Book of Songs or Aires*,

¹ E. Walker, *A History of Music in England*, Oxford, 1907, p. 59. Chapter IV contains some interesting transcriptions of English madrigals.

1597, there are twenty-one songs for four voices with lute accompaniment. In 1601 books of airs were published by Jones and by Campion and Rosseter, and in these two books there was not only an instrumental accompaniment, but a second innovation: the songs were written for one voice. The solo had long been found in the dramatic lyrics; it enters the song books at a comparatively late date.¹

To understand Elizabethan song, we must reconstruct our ideas of English music. In our own day Norway has produced in Grieg a song writer more famous than any one the great Anglo-Saxon race has given to the world in the last fifty years. Both in England and America we turn to foreign composers, players, and singers, while our native music constitutes a very small part of a concert programme. In the days of Elizabeth and James, English composers and performers were unsurpassed; their music was frequently printed abroad—in Berlin and Utrecht, in Frankfort and Nuremberg—and their fame spread through Europe. John Dowland was made lutanist to the court of Denmark; John Bull was appointed organist of Antwerp cathedral; Alphonso Ferrabosco was taken to Turin by the Duke of Savoy to be his chief musician. The tributes foreign critics paid to English music are laudatory in the highest degree. In a letter of Monsieur de Champany not written to flatter English pride (it was intercepted by the government), we read: "I was invited to Eltham . . . an house of the Queen. At which time I heard and saw three things that in all my travel of France, Italy and Spain, I never heard or saw the like. The first was a consort of music, so excellent and sweet as can not be expressed."² From Elizabeth to the humblest peasant, all classes delighted in song. Wherever the Queen

¹ J. Erskine, *The Elizabethan Lyric*, N. Y., 1903, chapter VII, *The Song-Book*; W. Bolle, *Die gedruckten englischen Liederbücher bis 1600*. *Palæstra*, XXIX, Berlin, 1903, p. iv.

² A. Dyce, *Works of Greene and Peele*, p. 567.

was entertained in her royal progresses, lyrics were sung in her honor; to-day our distinguished guests are merely dined. It is doubtful whether we enjoy songs as did our forefathers; certainly we lack their musical training. The preface to Morley's *Canzonets* (1597) has become a *locus classicus*: "Supper being ended, and music books (according to the custom) being brought to the table, the mistress of the house presented me with a part, earnestly requesting me to sing; but when, after many excuses, I protested unfeignedly that I could not, everyone began to wonder. Yea, some whispered to others, demanding how I was brought up." This sight reading was the more difficult because the singer had before him not the full score but merely his own part, which was never a simple harmony, as in our part songs, but a melody, for madrigals were polyphonic.

Though Morley probably exaggerated the case to recommend his book, the plays of the period show that song was not only a diversion but a necessary and highly prized accomplishment. In Othello's praise of Desdemona he cries admiringly, "O, she will sing the savageness out of a bear," and in his eyes it was not the least of her perfections. When Cassio desires to secure her favor, he arranges a serenade. In *Cymbeline* the foolish churl Cloten courts Imogen with song: "I am advised to give her music o' mornings; they say it will penetrate"; then follows "Hark! hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings." To turn from fiction to history, when David Rizzio wished to meet Mary of Scotland, he stationed himself on the stair at Holyrood and as she descended, carelessly strummed a gittern. There could be no surer means of attracting her attention. As the lyric played such a part in life, there were songs for all occasions; for weddings, for funerals, for dances, for feasts. There were special songs for all the trades—the tinkers, for example, were renowned for their catches—and the viol, the lute, or the virginals

¹ Bolle, p. iv.

were commonly found in the houses of rich and poor. To-day at the barber's shop waiting patrons read the papers; in Elizabethan days they played the barber's gittern. We say "as cheap as dirt"; that age expressed the idea in the phrase "as common as a barber's gittern," for every one used it.¹

We have had music married to immortal verse—the lyrics of Shakespeare and Heine set to the melodies of Schubert and Schumann—but our popular songs have not the slightest poetic value. The Elizabethan composers wrote their music for poetry which in many respects has never been surpassed. The most striking feature of these madrigals and songs is their great metrical charm—they fairly sing themselves—yet this does not imply that their subject matter is trivial or uninteresting. The song writers are genuinely fond of country life; they abandon the pastoral conventionalities of the Elizabethan romances for fresh descriptions of meadows and flowers, of May fields where a shepherd and his lass sing, dance, and make love:

"See where my love a-maying goes
With sweet dame Flora sporting!
She most alone with nightingales
In woods' delights consorting.

"Turn again, my dearest!
The pleasant'st air's in meadows;
Else by the river let us breathe,
And kiss among the willows."

writes an anonymous poet in Pilkington's madrigals, and Morley's best-known ballet repeats the theme:

"Now is the month of maying,
When'mery lads are playing
Each with his bonny lass
Upon the greeny grass.
Fa la la!

¹ W. Chappell, *Popular Music of the Olden Time*, London, 1859, pp. 98 ff.

“ The spring clad all in gladness
 Doth laugh at winter’s sadness,
 And to the bagpipe’s sound
 The nymphs tread out their ground.
 Fa la la!”

He returns to it again in:

“ Hark, jolly shepherds, hark; hark yon lusty ringing;
 How cheerfully the bells dance, the whilst the lads are spring-
 ing:
 Go then, why sit we here delaying?
 And all yond merry wanton lasses playing?”

These songs have a more homely tone than the lyrics of the drama; they are simpler both in thought and expression. In the sonnets and in the longer Elizabethan lyrics the birds are often described as merely a part of some meadow scene, precisely as an artist might paint them in the corner of a picture; here, as in some of the lyrics from the plays, they are named as old, familiar friends:

“ The nightingale, the organ of delight;
 The nimble lark, the blackbird, and the thrush;
 And all the pretty choristers of flight,
 That chant their music notes in every bush;
 Let them no more contend who shall excell,
 The cuckoo is the bird that bears the bell.”¹

or

“ Lady the birds right fairly
 Are singing ever early:
 The lark, the thrush, the nightingale,
 The make-sport cuckoo and the quail;
 These sing of love; then why sleep ye?
 To love your sleep it may not be.”²

¹ F. A. Cox, *English Madrigals in the time of Shakespeare*, London, 1899, pp. 128, 112, 70, 149.

² T. Oliphant, *Musa Madrigalesca*, London, 1837, p. 132.

It is in these songs, not in the formal pastorals of the period, that we find the truest expression of the spirit of outdoor life.

Although the majority of these songs are light-hearted bursts of melody, both composers and poets wished to show their skill in graver writing; accordingly the sunniest day has its clouds and the lasses are not always kind. We have many complaints of inconstancy; Amaryllis writes on the sand "my faith shall be immortal"

" But suddenly a storm of wind and weather
Blew all her faith and sand away together."

There is many a shepherd who with Philon, in William Byrd's finest lyric, sings "Untrue love, untrue love, adieu, love," still we feel these pastoral lovers will soon be reconciled. There are few tragedies such as "There were three ravens" and though the songs have a gentle melancholy, they lack deep feeling; they attract and delight us, but they rarely touch us with a sense of the dark moments in life. This, their chief defect, is in a great measure due to their music. Polyphonic, unaccompanied songs are best adapted to light and graceful dialogues or descriptions; in our modern music, the single voice, reinforced by an instrumental accompaniment, expresses the deepest feelings, but the Elizabethan instruments could portray only a very limited range of emotions. The lute, the most popular of all, has a faint, far-off sound, like an etherealized guitar; its music is delicate, but never strong. The gentle tone of the virginals has no sustained quality, and its rapid runs and trills which give to this instrument "a delightful shimmering, silver quality," would make it pathetically unfit to depict the terror of Schubert's *Erlkönig*, the passion of Brahms's *Von Ewiger Liebe*. It is true that at times these songs sound the high Platonic note:

“Thy mind is fairer than thy face or eyes:
And that same beauteous outside which thou hast,
Is but a curious casket, in which lies
The treasure of a mind, virtuous and chaste;”¹

they even attempt the invocations to sleep in the strain of the sonneteers:

“Come, shadow of my end, and shape of rest,
Allied to death, child of the blackest night,”²

but such verses are out of keeping; they break the charm, the mood of the songs is a quieter one.

We have said that the most admirable feature of these songs is their metrical grace, and something of their art can be seen in the stanzas we have cited. To-day our song metres are comparatively few; the stanzas are invariably regular and simple in construction. These lyrics range from a Spenserian stanza to

“April is in my mistress’ face,
And July in her eyes hath place:
Within her bosom is September,
But in her heart a cold December.”³

a quatrain which Carew remembered; from Sidney’s “The Nightingale as soon as April bringeth,” with its stanza and refrain of thirty-two lines, to the three line

“Why weeps, alas! my lady love and mistress?
Sweet-heart, fear not; what tho’ a-while I leave thee;
My life may fail, but I will not deceive thee.”⁴

¹ Cox, p. 159.

² T. Oliphant, p. 159.

³ P. 73.

⁴ P. 92. This is a translation from the Italian.

Fond of a quick beat to the measure, the tripping verses of these poets are without that vulgar facility which marks the modern song; they can be lively without being cheap. In equally sharp contrast to our lyric is the delight of poets and composers for a long, slow line:

“When thou must home to shades of underground,
And there arrived, a new admired guest.”

“Though love and all his pleasures are but toys,
They shorten tedious nights.”

“Dear, if you change, I’ll never chose again;
Sweet, if you shrink, I’ll never think of love;”

“I saw my lady weep,
And Sorrow, proud to be advanced so
In those fair eyes where all perfections keep.”

They seek new combinations of metre, and gain some of their most artistic effects in irregular stanzaic forms. From many examples we select but one—a slumber song quite different from the sonnet invocations to sleep:

“Sleep is a reconciling,
A rest that peace begets:—
Doth not the sun rise smiling,
When fair at even he sets?
—Rest you, then, rest, sad eyes!
Melt not in weeping!
While she lies sleeping
Softly, now softly lies
Sleeping.”¹

¹Cox, p. 169. For the music of this song, see Jackson's *English Melodies from the 13th to the 18th Century*, p. 60. This valuable book contains the airs for many of the lyrics we have quoted.

This is the perfection of song writing; the longer line of the first quatrain drops gently into a shorter measure and the singer's voice is almost hushed as the verse moves more and more quietly:

“Softly, now softly lies
Sleeping.”

The greater part of the poetry in the song books is anonymous, though familiar names—Sidney, Dyer, Lodge, Daniel—appear here and there. One song writer, however, is well known; his work contains all the best qualities of these lyrics and with a consideration of his verse we shall close our chapter.

Thomas Campion (1567-1620) was a finely educated and highly gifted physician whose tastes were literary and musical rather than scientific. He published a book of Latin epigrams; he wrote a treatise on English versification; he was the author of a well-known masque; but to-day he lives in his lyrics. He possessed in the highest degree the art of writing verse exquisite in workmanship yet perfectly adapted for music. In one of his lyrics he wrote

“Let well-tuned words amaze
With harmony divine,”

and his rhythms are always beautifully modulated. Moore's *Irish Melodies* have the true singing quality, but they lack the surprises, the variety, and the delicate shadings of Campion's metres. Where so much is remarkable, selection is difficult; he employs many styles and all successfully. In a gay mood he writes:

“I care not for these ladies,
That must be woo'd and prayed;
Give me kind Amarillis,
That wanton country maid;”

from this he turns to a broader melody:

“ Where she her sacred bower adorns,
The rivers clearly flow;
The groves and meadows swell with flowers,
The winds all gently blow.
Her sun-like beauty shines so fair,
Her Spring can never fade,
Who then can blame the life that strives
To harbour in her shade?”

He can write in the naïve spirit characteristic of so much in the song books, using an almost monosyllabic diction:

“ Never love unless you can
Bear with all the faults of man:”

at other times he uses a more heightened style and finely wrought phrase and writes the line that stirs the imagination, as in his most famous song, “When thou must home to shades of underground”:

“ Then wilt thou speak of banqueting delights,
Of masques and revels which sweet youth did make,
Of tourneys and great challenges of knights,
And all these triumphs for thy beauty’s sake:
When thou hast told these honours done to thee,
Then tell, O tell, how thou didst murder me.”¹

The subject-matter of Campion’s lyrics is not always as admirable as his style; he gives us the art song rather than the lyric of life. There is personal feeling in his religious lyrics, “View me, Lord,” for example, but as a rule he lacks emotional force. We search in vain through all his songs for even an echo of such a poignant cry as “Ae fond kiss, and then we sever.”

¹ See P. Vivian, *Campion’s Works*, Oxford, 1909, pp. 7, 134, 173, 17.

We have now considered briefly the chief writers of the Elizabethan lyric—their ideas, the emotions they expressed, their art—and the question naturally arises, Has this lyric of the golden time of song ever been surpassed? Has the modern age declined in the lyric as it has in the verse drama? It is always difficult to compare two ages because writers have a way of overlapping the purely artificial boundaries of a reign or of a generation; yet we may take as the basis of an estimate the lyrical poetry written during the twenty-four years between the publication of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, 1579, and the death of Elizabeth, 1603, and the modern lyrics composed in the twenty-three years between the appearance of the *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798, and the death of Keats, 1821. In every respect save one, the modern lyric seems the greater. If some ten of Shakespeare's sonnets are unexcelled, the best sonnets of Wordsworth and Keats stand by them and surpass the work of the other Elizabethans. The modern sonnet has more variety and harmony in its music; it has a greater wealth of observation; and it is far deeper in its interpretation of life. The modern Odes are much more significant than those of the Elizabethans; only Spenser's *Hymns*, and his *Prothalamion* and *Epithalamion* approach in poetic value and inspiration such typically modern work as the *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, the *Ode to the Departing Year*, *Adonais*, and the *Ode to a Nightingale*. How much more intense are the emotions of our modern poets, how much deeper is their outlook upon life! Their lyric verse is greater in its philosophy, in its purely spiritual content, while its technique is broader and more resourceful. The majority of Elizabethan lyrics disclose a purely personal mood of joy or sadness; the modern lyric shows these moods even more poignantly and in addition has what we may call the social mood, studying the thoughts and desires of whole peoples. To-day, the world seems to lie at the poet's feet.

In one respect, as we have said, the modern lyric must yield to the Elizabethan: its songs lack the melody and charm of those of the earlier age. The care-free spirit; the grace, the daintiness of metre; those touches above the reach of art, we can not attain. Our lyric poets think and feel too deeply ever to

“ recapture

The first fine careless rapture.”

This summing up is incomplete because we have not considered among the Elizabethans Jonson and Donne. Most of Jonson's lyrics were written after Elizabeth's death, yet the songs of Donne belong to her reign. Both poets in departing from Elizabethan traditions founded new schools of lyric verse; it is for this reason that we have chosen to discuss them in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE JACOBAN AND CAROLINE LYRIC

I

Early in the seventeenth century, if a citizen of London had been asked who was the foremost English writer, in all probability he would have replied, "Ben Jonson" (1573-1637). There have been great poets who have worked in retirement, who even shunned the life of their times, but Jonson was London born and bred. He lived in the open; his character was aggressive; his likes and dislikes were expressed in no uncertain language; and even the most un-literary must have admired his commanding personality. He had won his way to fame by sheer ability allied with indefatigable industry. As a boy he had commenced his classical studies at Westminster School with the great Camden as his master (he addressed to him in later years an "epigram" full of reverence and gratitude) but apparently he was denied the opportunity of studying at Oxford or Cambridge. His stepfather, a master builder, desired Jonson to follow that trade, but as he told Drummond, he could not support it and ran off to the Low Countries to fight.¹ Here he distinguished himself for his bravery, as he did, on his return to England, at the duelling ground; but he was more the disciple of Mercury than Mars, and he soon began his literary career as a reviser of old plays. From this humble position he rose to the most honored place among the writers of his generation. Shakespeare confessed himself to be an "unlettered clerk"; Jonson, while deeply engaged in his dramas, continued his studies until he had gained the most

¹ Cunningham-Gifford, *Works of Ben Jonson*, nine volumes, London, 1875, vol. IX, p. 388.

extensive knowledge of the classic writers—he ranks with Milton, Gray, and Landor in this respect—and the two universities in recognition of his scholarship, conferred upon him the Master's degree. In the social life of the times he played a most prominent part. He was a founder of the famous Apollo Club, where gathered the poets and wits, and at its meetings he presided over the choicest spirits of his day. His admirers, half in jest, half seriously, styled themselves the "Sons of Ben," and to be admitted by him to their number was no small compliment. Of lowly parentage, he was on familiar terms with the chief men of his day—Bacon, Selden, the Earl of Newcastle, Lord Falkland; the list would be a long one—and he was an honored guest at the homes of the nobility. He was appointed poet laureate; he became the writer of court masques; his entertainments were the delight of the nobility; and his verses were spoken by the members of the Royal household and of the Royal family. It is small wonder that the age admired the poet who had worked his way from the ranks to such social and literary triumphs.

For a man of Jonson's temperament, creative work was not sufficient; he was so confident of his own tastes and of his own literary theories that he wished to impose them on others. In his poem to Camden he exclaims

"What weight, and what authority in thy speech!"

and this force which he admired in his old teacher, he possessed himself. Jonson is the one poet of his time who has left us any trenchant criticism of his contemporaries (for we may disregard the personalities of literary quarrels); the sole writer who has stated his literary creed. Though it has been shown that many of the criticisms and statements of opinion in his *Discoveries* are literal translations from the classics and from the writings of the humanists, yet these very passages were made his own simply because they coincided with his ideas. So far as disclosing Jonson's attitude

of mind is concerned, they might as well have been written by him; it is accordingly no difficult matter to discover his theories in regard to the lyric.

The first point that we notice is Jonson's utter lack of sympathy with the chief tendencies of the Elizabethan lyric. For many of his views we must rely on his conversations with Drummond, hurried, possibly inaccurate notes, taken by the Scottish poet whom Jonson had walked north to see. Drummond's admirations were Jonson's dislikes; he must have been pained by many of his guest's caustic remarks; and he made his notes in no admiring spirit. Would that this Jonson had found a Boswell! "He is a great lover and praiser of himself; a contemner and scorner of others," concludes Drummond, and he is hardly an impartial witness; yet though we may shade down the tones of his picture, it is evidently true in its essentials.¹ We see Jonson, secure in his own opinions, turning his back on the acknowledged masters of lyric verse. Drummond's conversations were written in 1618, when the great vogue of the sonnet had passed, yet it is strange to hear that Jonson "cursed Petrarch for redacting verses to sonnets; which he said were like that tyrant's bed, where some who were too short were racked; others too long, cut short," and that "cross rhymes and stanzas were all forced."² Jonson's dislike for the sonnet is shown in his first play, *Every Man in his Humor*, acted in 1598. Here he parodies a sonnet written by Daniel, and sneers at the form in Matthew, the "Town Gull," who asserts, "I am melancholy myself, divers times, sir, and then do I no more but take pen and paper, presently, and overflow you half a score, or a dozen sonnets at a sitting."³ When we realize that for Jonson Petrarch

¹ P. 416.

² P. 370.

³ Act III, scene i, vol. I, p. 63. In a poem in the *Underwoods*, vol. VIII, p. 398, he alludes jeeringly to a sonnet written on the "lace, laid on a smock" and to a madrigal on the Lady Mayoress's "French hood and scarlet gown."

and the whole Italian school meant nothing, we understand how radical were his views.

We have seen that the Elizabethan lyric poets turned as eagerly to France as they did to Italy and that they "borrowed" prodigally from Marot, Desportes, Du Bellay, Ronsard; Jonson, in a poem prefixed to Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas, states frankly that his praise is

"the child of ignorance
And utter stranger to all air of France."¹

This was in 1605, and by 1618 Jonson had mastered enough French to compare the translation with the original and to appreciate Ronsard's odes, yet on the whole we are probably justified in accepting Drummond's statement that Jonson "neither doth understand French nor Italian"; that is, he had no real knowledge of these literatures.² In ignoring the Renaissance poetry of the continent, Jonson condemned his own countrymen who were nourished by it. He could not follow the leadership of the men of his time; he was not pleased with Spenser's stanza, nor did Donne's style, the opposite extreme, satisfy him. He was not a genius of the first order, striking out in new paths; his studies had made him a thoroughgoing classicist; and he sought for his models in the poets of Rome.

It is interesting to compare his strictures on his contemporaries with his whole-hearted praise of the classics. He told Drummond that to correct his faults he must study Quintilian, and recommended for his reading Horace, Tacitus, Martial, and Juvenal.³ He sends to a friend a poetical invitation to dinner, and promises him, in addition to the delicacies of the table,

¹ Vol. VIII, p. 231.

² Vol. IX, p. 371.

³ P. 366.

“ my man
Shall read a piece of Virgil, Tacitus,
Livy, or of some better book to us,
Of which we'll speak our minds, amidst our meat.”¹

On the failure of his *New Inn* (1629), Jonson wrote one of his most vigorous pieces; to quote his own words, “The just indignation the author took at the vulgar censure of his play, by some malicious spectators, begat the following Ode to himself”:

“ Come leave the loathèd stage,
And the more loathsome age;
Where pride and impudence in faction knit,
Usurp the chair of wit!”

He is thoroughly moved, he is hurt to the quick, and every line betrays that he is speaking from his heart. At this time, he turns to his classics:

“ Leave things so prostitute,
And take the Alcaic lute;
Or thine own Horace, or Anacreon's lyre;
Warm thee by Pindar's fire:
And though thy nerves be shrunk, and blood be cold
Ere years have made thee old,
Strike that disdainful heat
Throughout, to their defeat,
As curious fools, and envious of thy strain,
May blushing swear no palsy's in thy brain.”²

It would be a simple matter to cite passage after passage in which Jonson shows that he is a child of Greece and Rome; these will suffice for our purpose.

¹ Vol. VIII, p. 204.

² Vol. V, p. 415.

Jonson turned to the classics because he was satiated with the "sugared" sonnet and weary of the rich melodies of Elizabethan song. He believed the lyric lacked force and to a man of his sturdy disposition, this was a fatal defect. "Others there are," he wrote in his *Discoveries*, "that have no composition at all; but a kind of tuning and rhyming fall, in what they write. It runs and slides, and only makes a sound. Women's poets they are called, as you have women's tailors;

" They write a verse as smooth, as soft as cream,
In which there is no torrent, nor scarce stream."¹

He wished a more masculine style; the delicate graces of the song books, the richer tones of the *Prothalamion* he did not desire. Once at least he expressed vigorously a dislike of rhyme:

" Greek was free from rhyme's infection,
Happy Greek by this protection,
Was not spoiled."²

He might have agreed with Milton in wishing the English language freed from "the troublesome bondage of rhyming." He desired no lyric outbursts, but a regular, well-ordered, sober metre; accordingly he told Drummond that "couplets" were "the bravest sort of verses." In a preface to a song book, Morley wrote: "You must in your music be wavering, like the wind, sometime wanton, sometime drooping, sometime grave and staid, otherwhile effeminate . . . and

¹ Vol. IX, p. 157.

² Vol. VIII, p. 379.

show the uttermost of your variety, and the more variety you show, the better shall you please."¹ This description of Elizabethan music applies equally to Elizabethan metres. In place of this fluid verse, Jonson wished a fixed form; the lyric structure must be more solid, more compact, with each verse well balanced and carefully polished. There are no "native wood notes wild" in his songs; his compositions, says Clarendon, who knew him, "were slow and upon deliberation," for Jonson possessed "judgment to order and govern fancy, rather than excess of fancy."²

If he disapproved of the style of the contemporary lyric, he was displeased also with its subject-matter. Many of the lyrics are pure music, little else; he wished for more substance. He disliked, as he expressed it, "those that merely talk and never think"; he was a moralist, and he was not contented as were many of the Elizabethans to enjoy the beauty of the world and the pleasures of life. Spenser was also a moralist, but he saw the world with the eyes of Plato; Jonson, from the standpoint of Horace and Martial. How different from the style of Spenser's *Hymns* is the close-knit verse of Jonson's *Epode*:

" Not to know vice at all, and keep true state,
Is virtue and not fate:
Next to that virtue, is to know vice well,
And her black spite expel.

* * * * *

" He that for love of goodness hateth ill,
Is more crown-worthy still,
Than he, which for sin's penalty forbears;
His heart sins, though he fears."³

¹ Cox, p. xi.

² *Jonson*, vol. I, p. ccxxv.

³ Vol. VIII, p. 263, 265.

This epigrammatic expression reminds us of the Queen Anne poetry, though the polish is not here, and indeed so many traits of the English classical school are found in Jonson's work that he has been called its founder.

To illustrate further Jonson's style and thought, we shall make one more citation, this time from his *Pindaric Ode*—another example of his classical tastes, for he is the first English writer to imitate the Greek ode with its strophe, antistrophe and epode:

" It is not growing like a tree
 In bulk, doth make men better be;
 Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
 To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sear:
 A lily of a day
 Is fairer far in May,
 Although it fall and die that night;
 It was the plant and flower of light.
 In small proportions we just beauties see;
 And in short measures, life may perfect be."¹

If we compare these verses, among the noblest in the language, with the stanza of Spenser's *Epithalamion*, in which he describes the perfections of his bride, "the inward beauty of her lively spright," we realize the change that has come over English poetry.

It was impossible for Jonson to withdraw himself entirely from Elizabethan influences and some of his songs are in the manner of that age and have the music of the madrigals, for example:

" Slow, slow, fresh fount; keep time with my salt tears:
 Yet slower, yet; O faintly, gentle springs;"²

¹ Vol. IX, p. 12.

² *Cynthia's Revels*, produced in 1600, Act I, scene i, vol. II, p. 223.

or still better, because of its lyric rapture:

“ Have you seen but a bright lily grow,
 Before rude hands have touched it?
 Have you marked but the fall of the snow,
 Before the soil hath smutched it?
 Have you felt the wool of beaver?
 Or swan’s down ever?
 Or have smelt o’ the bud o’ the brier?
 Or the nard in the fire?
 Or have tasted the bag of the bee?
 O so white, O so soft, O so sweet is she!”¹

This, however, is not his customary style; much more characteristic in its polish and restraint is his

“ Queen and huntress, chaste and fair,
 Now the sun is laid to sleep,
 Seated in thy silver chair,
 State in wonted manner keep:
 Hesperus entreats thy light,
 Goddess excellently bright.”²

His two best known lyrics show this same finish. “Still to be neat,” a translation of a poem in the *Pancharis* of the contemporary writer, Jean Bonnefons, has the careful balancing, the antithetical manner of Pope:

“ Still to be neat, still to be drest,
 As you were going to a feast;
 Still to be powdered, still perfumed;
 Lady, it is to be presumed,
 Though art’s hid causes are not found,
 All is not sweet, all is not sound.”³

¹ This song first appeared in *The Devil is an Ass*, produced in 1616, Act II, scene ii; Jonson afterwards included it in the *Celebration of Charis*, a series of love poems, in the Elizabethan manner, written when he was fifty years of age.

² *Cynthia’s Revels*, Act V, scene iii, vol. II, p. 339.

³ *The Silent Woman*, produced in 1609, Act I, scene i, vol. III, p. 337.

Every effect is calculated; the thought could not be more tersely expressed; and we may well believe Jonson's statement that he wrote his poems in prose before turning them into verse. His masterpiece is a triumph of workmanship, for "Drink to me only with thine eyes" is based on a few scattered phrases in the love letters of the Greek sophist Philostratus. It is interesting to compare the original with the finished song: "Drink to me with thine eyes only—Or, if thou wilt, putting the cup to thy lips, fill it with kisses, and so bestow it upon me." If we look at the first stanza, so familiar we need not cite it, we find that its two splendid lines which Jonson never surpassed:

"The thirst that from the soul doth rise,
Doth ask a drink divine,"

are not in the Greek.¹ The whole poem is one of the most remarkable examples in the history of the lyric of the fusion of imitative work and pure creation.

We have not space to mention the rest of Jonson's lyrics. His epitaphs are among the finest in the language; the two written for his children have more pathos than all the formal elegies of the Elizabethans.² His four religious lyrics, of which the most impressive, because of its feeling, is

"Good and great God! can I not think of thee,
But it must straight my melancholy be?"

point the way to Herbert and Herrick.³ There are a large number of lyrics scattered through his *Masques*, the *Forest*, and the *Underwoods*. All of them show his workmanship, though few equal his

¹ Vol. VIII, p. 259. See *The Academy*, December 6, 1884, p. 377.

² Pp. 155, 167.

³ P. 279.

“O do not wanton with those eyes,
Lest I be sick with seeing,”¹

a lyric whose simple, straightforward style reminds us of Restoration song at its best. Though Jonson, save in two or three instances, never reached the heights attained by even the lesser Elizabethan lyrists; though we may agree with Swinburne that “to come so near so often and yet never to touch the goal of lyric triumph has never been the fortune and the misfortune of any other poet,” we must remember, in estimating Jonson’s achievement, that he lives in the work of his followers as well as in his own verses. To name but one instance, the lyrics of Herrick owe, in a great measure, their charm, their perfection to the inspiration he received, as he gratefully acknowledged, from his patron saint, “Father Ben.”

Jonson informed Drummond that he considered Donne for some things the finest poet in the world, and in three sets of verses he has recorded, in no qualified terms, his admiration for him.² He was not alone in his high estimate of Donne’s genius, for the age lavished its praise upon the poet whose influence impressed itself, to an extraordinary degree, upon the writings of the time. To-day Donne’s poems are never imitated; they are not even widely read, for though he has his circle of devoted admirers, their number is small. What is there in his work that compelled the admiration of his contemporaries, that wrought such changes in the lyric; and why is he not, with Sidney and Spenser, with Shakespeare and Jonson, a household word to our own time?

John Donne (1573-1631) was in turn student, soldier, traveller, secretary to the Lord Chancellor, and a penniless lawyer subsisting on the bounty of friends and patrons. Late in life, at the insistence of King James, he took orders and ended a career filled with sickness, poverty, and dis-

¹ P. 306.

² Pp. 156, 197, 200.

couragement that dreamed of suicide, as Dean of St. Paul's and the greatest preacher of his age. One of the most fascinating characters in English literature, it is unfortunate that with the exception of his hymns, his lyrics do not represent the different stages of his development; they do not spring from years of thought and experience, for they are sparks struck out in youth by his vigorous nature. Walton states that most of them were written before Donne was twenty; Jonson, who knew Donne well, says before he was twenty-five. Donne never sent them to the press. They were first published a few months after his death, but they had long circulated in manuscript, working as great a change in English poetry as though they had gone through edition after edition.

The moment we open Donne's lyrics, we find ourselves in an unexplored realm. As a rule the young poet follows his models until he has attained the difficult art of self-expression. Chatterton imitates the ballads; Keats writes with his Spenser before him, but over Donne's pages we might place his own line, "To all, which all love, I say no." The age was fascinated not only by the emotional force and the unconventional thought of his poems, but by their new and strange style. In the case of Donne it is peculiarly unsatisfactory to consider the style apart from the content of his verse, but we shall attempt this and examine first his manner of expressing himself.

We have seen that Elizabethan verse was lyrical in the oldest sense of that term, for an astonishingly large number of poems were written for music and many that were never sung are perfectly adapted for instrumental accompaniment. Few of Donne's poems are actually songs; they are lyrics because they are short, subjective pieces, showing in every line the poet's dominating personality. If we do not find the lilt of song in most of his work, it is not because song was beyond him. He could write, Walton pointed out, verses

“soft and smooth when he thought them fit and worth his labour,” as in his adaptation of Marlowe:

“Come live with me, and be my love,
And we will some new pleasures prove
Of golden sands, and crystal brooks,
With silken lines and silver hooks.”

If this meter seems too facile, we turn to “Go and catch a falling star,” with a tripping refrain in each stanza:

“And find
What wind
Serves to advance an honest mind,”

or the better known, and far more sincere

“Sweetest love, I do not go,
For weariness of thee,
Nor in hope the world can show
A fitter love for me.”¹

If we could restrict ourselves in the selection, it would be possible to show that Donne's work had rare metrical beauty. His ear was not defective; he did not possess an imperfect sense of rhythm, for no man can write splendidly again and again by sheer accident. He deliberately put aside the popular manner of the day and going to the other extreme, wrote verses crabbed and unmusical in their movement and disconcerting, to say the least, in their rhymes:

“Whether abstract, spiritual love they like.”

“For I am a very dead thing.”

“Ends love in this, that my man
Can be as happy as I can, if he can
Endure?”²

¹ E. K. Chambers, *Poems of John Donne, Muses' Library*, London, 1896, vol. I, pp. 47, 4, 16.

² Vol. I, pp. 31, 45, 41.

These are typical examples of harsh rhythm; for slovenly rhymes take the triplet:

“When this book is made thus,
Should again the ravenous
Vandals and the Goths invade us.”¹

To select from Donne’s poems lines that lack all metrical charm, verses as uncouth as Skelton’s, is a simple task; the difficulty is to reconcile them with stanzas marked by a rare and haunting beauty:

“Twice or thrice had I loved thee,
Before I knew thy face or name;
So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame,
Angels affect us oft, and worshipped be.”

“Whoever comes to shroud me, do not harm,
Nor question much,
That subtle wreath of hair, which crowns my arm;
The mystery, the sign you must not touch.”

“I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we loved? were we not weaned till then?
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers’ den?
’Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be;
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, ’twas but a dream of thee.

The simplest, most familiar metres acquire a new tone at his hands:

“If, as I have, you also do
Virtue in woman see,
And dare love that, and say so too,
And forget the He and She;

¹ P. 31.

² Pp. 21, 61, 3.

“ And if this love, though placèd so,
From profane men you hide,
Which will no faith on this bestow,
Or, if they do, deride;

“ Then you have done a braver thing
Than all the Worthies did;
And a braver thence will spring,
Which is, to keep that hid.”¹

Such work as this unfortunately comprises the smaller part of his verse, and taking his poems as a whole, we can readily understand Jonson's vigorous remark, that Donne, for not keeping accent, deserves hanging.

There are several reasons we may give to account for his unmusical moments. Undoubtedly many of the poems were struck off at white heat, and were never revised. All that he wished was to express the thought, the emotion of the hour. At times, his ideas found perfect expression; at others, language faltered, and instead of deliberating and searching painfully for the well-made phrase, he was content with the first imperfect utterance. Moreover, as we shall see, he flouted the ideas of the day, and what more natural than that he should dislike the sweetness of Spenser, the grace of the song writers, the refinement of Jonson? There was a morbid strain in Donne; the grotesque appealed strongly to him; and as it affected his thought, it made itself felt in his style. We can endure his worst dissonances because at his best his verse has a music which no other writer of his day could reach.

Turning to the poems, we find that many of them bear the marks of that irregular life he led when he left the university for the town, of wild days whose memories long troubled his mind. Several poems are frankly sensual in tone, but their cynicism is too much on parade; one detects

in them the swagger of precocious youth delighting to shock old-fashioned morality. Donne declares for community in love; boasts of his inconstancy; and asserts that no true woman exists. It would be a mistake to refuse to see in such writing the marks of days ill spent, but it is equally a mistake to read too much into them or to construct from them, as Mr. Gosse has done, a definite tale of dishonorable intrigue. To his own times, the boldness of these poems must have seemed amazing. The Petrarchian tradition still lingered; the poets of the age worshipped woman from afar; she was a goddess, a saint, or at the very least a shepherdess of surpassing virtue and beauty. } Donne writes that women

“are ours as fruits are ours;
He that but tastes, he that devours,
And he that leaves all, doth as well;
Changed loves are but changed sorts of meat;
And when he hath the kernel eat,
Who doth not fling away the shell?”¹

So absurdly cynical are such poems as *The Indifferent*, *Community*, *Confined Love*, or *Love's Alchemy* with its ending

“Hope not for mind in women; at their best,
Sweetness and wit they are, but mummy, possess'd,”

that Donne loses the very effect he seeks to gain.

Had he written in this fashion only, he would never have made his impression upon the lyric. Side by side with these poems, which explain in part the neglect of Donne to-day, are found a sharply contrasted group of lyrics expressing in tones of passionate sincerity the deepest affection and devotion. This sudden change in his mood may be attributed to his meeting with Anne More, whom he married in 1601 despite the opposition of her family. This runaway match cost him his secretary's position and reduced

¹ Vol. I, p. 33.

him to utter poverty, yet through years of ambitions unrealized and hopes deferred, his devotion to her never faltered; when she died in 1617, he grieved until his friends despaired for his own life. We know that "Sweetest love, I do not go," was written for her; we may assume she inspired his finest work.

Donne was a romanticist at heart. He thought of love as a mystic power transcending all boundaries of time and space; it was a union of two spirits forming a new and controlling soul. To depict such a love he brought all the strength of his vigorous intellect, all the emotion of his sensitive nature; in celebrating it he departed as widely from Elizabethan tradition as when he mocked it. He wastes no words in praising a woman's beauty, in comparing her eyes to stars, her hair to golden wires:

" But he who loveliness within
Hath found, all outward loathes,
For he who colour loves, and skin,
Loves but their oldest clothes."¹

To the familiar situations of Elizabethan love poetry Donne brings his own, never the conventional point of view. The Elizabethans uttered bitter complaints on absence from their loves; for Donne there can be no such thing as real separation:

" Dull sublunary lovers' love
—Whose soul is sense—can not admit
Of absence, 'cause it doth remove
The thing which elemented it.

" But we by a love so far refined,
That ourselves know not what it is,
Inter-assured of the mind,
Care less eyes, lips and hands to miss."²

¹ P. 6.

² P. 52; cf. p. 54.

Nothing is commoner in the song books or the sonnet collections than pictures of a lady weeping; descriptions of beauty in distress with a comparison of tearful eyes to flowing springs. By his unusual and forceful similes, and by the rush of his final apostrophe, Donne completely transforms this stock theme:

"O! more than moon,
Draw not up seas to drown me in thy sphere;
Weep me not dead, in thine arms, but forbear
To teach the sea, what it may do too soon."¹

Though many illustrations of Donne's avoidance of the beaten track could easily be given, one more must suffice. It was a custom for men of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to wear bracelets made of their ladies' hair. Among the slain at Marston Moor, Sir Charles Lucas recognized "one cavalier with a bracelet of hair round his wrist. He desired the bracelet to be taken off, saying that he knew an honourable lady who would give thanks for it."² Verses on these love tokens are common in all languages; Melin de Saint-Gelais has a poem, Alessandro Gatti a madrigal, both in the tone of gallantry, on such a gift. Donne writes of one, but disdaining the spirit of trifling compliment, his imagination pierces the tomb and sees there a mouldering skeleton with "A bracelet of bright hair about the bone."

Originality is not enough to establish a poet's fame; it may or may not lead to the finest work. With Donne's unconventionality went two rare qualities which our citations have illustrated: he stirred the feelings, he awoke the imagination by far-reaching suggestion. In *Canonization* he speaks of two lovers "who did the whole world's soul contract" into their eyes, and Donne could put the heart of a

¹ P. 40.

² C. R. Markham, *A Life of the great Lord Fairfax*, London, 1870, p. 174.

poem—contract the soul—into a single phrase. The Elizabethans would express in a sonnet what he tells in a line. By sheer intellectual force, far removed from mere cleverness, he could transform a thought or feeling by expressing it in similes startlingly quaint yet apposite. The best of them were not sought out with care and calculation; his mind, deeply moved, found them instinctively. When Shelley compares the skylark, hidden in the cloud, to a poet, a maiden, a glow worm, a rose, we do not feel that he painfully seeks these comparisons, but that his mind naturally overflows in them. So with Donne; every stanza in his *Fever* embodies a new and strange thought:

“ But yet thou canst not die, I know;
 To leave this world behind, is death;
 But when thou from this world wilt go,
 The whole world vapours with thy breath.

* * * * *

“ O wrangling schools, that search what fire
 Shall burn this world, had none the wit
 Unto this knowledge to aspire,
 That this her fever might be it?”¹

This peculiar turn of mind persisted to the end. In the *Hymn to God, my God, in my sickness*, written on his death-bed, after a touching and beautiful opening stanza, he compares himself to a map which his doctors, “grown cosmographers,” are studying.

Attempting to discover the secret of Donne’s power, the age thought it lay in this ability to detect curious analogies. This was called “wit,” but with our modern notions of the meaning of that word, it is strange to read of the “witty Donne.” Dr. Johnson was more misleading when he applied the term “metaphysical” to this trait of Donne’s mind.²

¹ Vol. I, p. 20.

² See that *locus classicus*, Johnson’s *Life of Cowley*.

Moved by this poetry and desiring to imitate it, the men of the day seized upon "wit" as the one thing needful. At times they partially caught Donne's manner; his spirit escaped them. Through all the ingenuity of Donne's thought, we feel the glow of emotion. The *Fever* ends with this passionate declaration:

"Yet 'twas of my mind, seizing thee,
Though it in thee can not perséver;
For I had rather owner be
Of thee one hour, than all else ever."

It is small wonder that such writing changed the whole spirit of the lyric.

II

It must not be presumed that all the lyrists of this age were followers of either Donne or Jonson; as a rule, they showed traces of their influence, but we may name two poets, whose writings extended over this period, and yet were Elizabethan in their spirit. William Browne (1591-1645), a student at Oxford and the Inner Temple, a friend of Drayton and Jonson, passed his life quietly in the country and his poetry is as peaceful as was his career. He had a gentle fancy; a genuine love for nature (his descriptions of a "musical concert of birds" in the third song of *Britannia's Pastorals*, his chief work, is a most delightful bit of writing); but he adds nothing to the development of the lyric.¹ Skelton, of whom he speaks slightly, had a decided individuality; Browne is content to be a humble imitator of Spenser, writing with his eye on the *Visions*, the *Shepherds Calendar*, and the *Faerie Queene*, but never catching either the

¹ Gordon Goodwin, *The Poems of William Browne*, Muses Library, London, 1894, vol. I, p. 89.

color or the music of his model. He had but little of the song spirit; his "Steer, hither steer your winged pines," and "Now that the Spring hath filled our veins," are well written but in no respect remarkable.¹ He has caught the lilt of the song books in

" For her gait if she be walking,
Be she sitting I desire her
For her state's sake, and admire her
For her wit if she be talking.
Gait and state and wit approve her;
For which all and each I love her."²

He will be remembered for one poem, the first half of his epitaph on "Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother." He has won immortality by six lines, and in these well-known verses we may see the influence of the epitaphs of Jonson, who was long considered the author of this little masterpiece.³

One of Browne's warmest friends was George Wither (1588-1667), a writer who shared with Quarles the doubtful honor of being the favorite poet of the unlettered multitude. In the fourth eclogue of the *Shepherd's Hunting*, in which he introduces William Browne, he says of himself that he is one of those

" Who at twice-ten have sung more
Than some will do at fourscore,"

and he is indeed a most voluminous writer, but unfortunately his good work was over by the time he was thirty—he should have had the grace to die then—and he degenerated into a writer of doggerel. In *Fair Virtue*, composed in 1612, but published ten years later, and in the *Shepherd's Hunt-*

¹ Vol. II, pp. 170, 213.

² P. 226.

³ I have discussed the question of Browne's authorship in the *Athenæum*, August 11, 1906.

ing we see him at his best. In the songs included in these poems, and in their lyrical passages, his verse moves lightly and harmoniously; it is unaffected, simple, and so spontaneous that it seems improvisation. He had, unfortunately, the fatal gift of fluency; even his best work is improved by condensation. Could he have learned from Jonson the art of self-restraint, he would have stood with the best lyrists of the age. He was an idealist; he had the poet's vision, an enthusiasm for verse, that remind us of the greater Elizabethans. His light-heartedness, which instantly attracts us, even unhappy love can not destroy; we see it in two of his best lyrics:

“ Many a merry meeting
 My love and I have had;
 She was my only sweeting,
 She made my heart full glad;
 The tears stood in her eyes
 Like to the morning dew;
 But now, alas! sh'as left me,
 Falero, lero, loo!”

The second one we need not cite, for

“ Shall I wasting in despair
 Die because a woman's fair?

which struck the fancy of Wither's age and called forth nearly as many replies and imitations as Raleigh's *Lie*, has retained its popularity to this day.

We now come to a group of lyric poets who are closely connected with Charles I and his court. With all his pedantry, James I had an appreciation of poetry, and he even tried his own hand at verse composition, with sad results. In Henry Glapthorne's *White Hall* (1642), we have five and a half pages given to a eulogy of the Elizabethan era—the

glories of the Queen's court, the defeat of the Armada, the bravery of Drake and Essex, but not a line devoted to the Elizabethan poets. Coming to James's reign, we are told

"The Muses then did flourish, and upon
My pleasant mounts planted their Helicon.
Then that great wonder of the knowing age,
Whose very name merits the amplest page
In Fame's fair book, admired Jonson stood
Up to the chin in the Pierian flood,
Quaffing crowned bowls of Nectar, with his bays
Growing about his temples; chanting lays
Such as were fit for such a sacred ear
As his majestic Master's was, to hear,
Whom he so often pleased with (those mighty tasks
Of wit and judgment) his well laboured masks."

Charles was not only a greater lover of poetry than was his father, but he was highly endowed with artistic tastes and gifts; he said that he could have earned his livelihood at any of the arts except tapestry making. He was extremely fond of music and could play on the *viola da gamba*, the prototype of the modern violoncello. In sculpture and painting he had the reputation of being the finest connoisseur in Europe, and his love of the fine arts is strikingly shown, not only in the many portraits of himself and of the royal family which he commissioned Van Dyck to make, but by the superb collection of pictures which he purchased, and which the Puritans, in their ignorance, sold for a few pounds. It was the ambition of Charles to make the English court famous in art and letters; the banqueting room of Whitehall was to have been the most magnificent in all Europe, for Van Dyck was to have decorated it at an expense of eighty thousand pounds. Perfectly versed in modern languages, Charles was well acquainted with the French and Italian writers, and showed the soundness of his literary tastes by his admiration for

Shakespeare and Spenser. If we add to all this the fact that Charles was of a romantic temperament, as his runaway journey to see the Spanish Infanta startlingly shows (we wonder why the historical novelist has overlooked this exciting episode), it is quite natural that his court attracted and inspired many a lyric poet.

Thomas Carew (1594-1639) studied at Oxford, had a brief diplomatic career in Italy and at Paris, and was finally made by Charles a gentleman of the bed-chamber. He became a brilliant figure in court circles of which he was the laureate, and though his poems were not published until after his death, they were well known and made him honored for his "delicate wit and poetic fancy." We are not surprised when we read of him that he "pleased the ladies with his courtly Muse."

The moment we open Carew's poems, we see in his first lines, the *Spring*, an epitome of all his work.¹ In their descriptive poems, especially of nature, the Elizabethans revelled in a wealth of detail; here we have a complete picture in twelve highly wrought couplets. It is art rather than nature that we find in such verses as:

" Now that the winter's gone, the earth hath lost
Her snow-white robes; and now no more the frost
Candies the grass, or casts an icy cream
Upon the silver lake or crystal stream."

Where the Elizabethans had passion, or at least deep sentiment, we have gallantry:

" Now all things smile; only my love doth lower,
Nor hath the scalding noon-day sun the power
To melt that marble ice, which still doth hold
Her heart congealed, and makes her pity cold."

¹ Arthur Vincent, *Poems of Thomas Carew*, *Muses' Library*, London 1899, p. 1.

In place of high, Sidneyan devotion, we have compliment expressed with epigrammatic point:

“ Amyntas now doth with his Chloris sleep
Under a sycamore, and all things keep
Time with the season: only she doth carry
June in her eyes, in her heart January.”

If we may speak of two schools of lyric verse—the school of Jonson and of Donne—we find that Carew is a son of Ben. With all his age, he had a deep admiration for Donne, whom he considered not only greater than Virgil and Tasso, but “worth all that went before.” His elegy upon him is no conventional expression of mourning; it shows a very clear perception of Donne’s genius, of his effect on English poetry, and it is not often that contemporary criticism is so just in its appreciation.¹ We find in Carew’s poems many verbal reminiscences of Donne, faint echoes of his lines:

“ Then though our bodies are disjoined,
As things that are to place confined,
Yet let our boundless spirits meet,
And in love’s sphere each other greet;”

or

“ This silken wreath, which circles in mine arm,
Is but an emblem of that mystic charm
Wherewith the magic of your beauties binds
My captive soul,”

but Donne’s imagination, his intensity of emotion is not reflected even faintly in the poem which ends in antithesis and epigram:

“ That knot your virtue tied; this, but your hands;
That, Nature framed; but this was made by art;
This makes my arm your prisoner; that, my heart.”²

¹ Pp. 104, 100.

² Pp. 29, 39.

The last line, though much less effective, reminds us of Jonson's

"They strike mine eyes, but not my heart."

If we wish to measure the difference that separates Donne from Carew, we have only to compare the former's *Fever* with Carew's *Song to his mistress* "she burning in a fever."¹ Carew had but little of Donne's "wit," and he can not be said to have caught his manner in such poems as the one on "A fly that flew into my mistress' eye," and which, playing about Celia's cheek

"Sucked all the incense and the spice,
And grew a bird of paradise.
At last into her eye she flew,
There, scorched in flames and drowned in dew,
Like Phaethon from the sun's sphere,
She fell,"

or the *Looking Glass*

"whose smooth face wears
Your shadow, which a sun appears,
Was once a river of my tears.

"About your cold heart they did make
A circle, where the briny lake
Congealed into a crystal cake."²

It is as an artist that Carew lives; his poems are "neat and polished," to use his own phrase, and even the most trivial are written with a care that provoked the ridicule of Suckling:

¹ P. 47.

² Pp. 52, 25.

"Tom Carew was next, but he had a fault
That would not well stand with a laureat;
His muse was hide-bound, and th' issue of's brain
Was seldom brought forth but with trouble and pain."¹

This is Carew's chief virtue, for lacking inspiration, he did not simulate passion but was content to perfect his style, charming the ear by a well-balanced line, by a delicate modulation in the metre.

"Thy laboured works shall live, when Time devours
Th' abortive offspring of their hasty hours,"

he wrote to Jonson, defending him from his detractors, and there are no hasty moments in Carew's writings.² He does not paint on a large canvas, but offers us miniatures; every stroke is well considered; every simile is beautifully wrought, as in the picture of the pilgrim drinking at the spring in his *Good Council to a young Maid*. The old fire has gone and moderation takes its place. Carew is urged to write an elegy on Gustavus Adolphus, but he knows his own limitations and replies:

"Alas! how may
My lyric feet, that of the smooth soft way
Of love and beauty only know the tread
In dancing paces, celebrate the dead
Victorious King."³

Not only in his style but in his thought does Carew show the change that has taken place in lyric poetry. Graceful compliment is his prevailing tone; he never strikes deep.

¹ *A Session of the Poets*.

² *Carew*, p. 91.

³ P. 104.

Carpe diem is his motto, yet the passing of beauty awakens in him real sadness:

“ But if your beauties once decay,
You never know a second May.

* * * * *

Spend not in vain your life's short hour
But crop in time your beauty's flower,
Which will away, and doth together
Both bud and fade, both blow and wither.”¹

His epitaphs, which bear the marks of Jonson's influence, are more remarkable for their polish than for their pathos. In his love poems, I find it difficult to discover the “sincere and tender passion” which Mr. Gosse attributes to them.

“ Give me more love or more disdain;
The torrid or the frozen zone
Bring equal ease unto my pain,
The temperate affords me none:
Either extreme of love or hate,
Is sweeter than a calm estate,”

writes Carew, but there is nothing of the old fervor of the sonneteers in his songs. Sidney's Muse “tempers her words to trampling horses feet”; Carew's, to a “chamber melody,” or to use his own phrase, to the “sweet airs of our tuned violins.”² His poems are the love songs of the court, serenatas

“ which the starved lover sings
To his proud fair, best quitted with disdain.”

The old idealism has disappeared; too often Carew's profligate life is reflected in his verses, and though he praises “gentle thoughts and calm desires,” though he writes

¹ P. 4.

² *Carew*, pp. 16, 107.

“ But as you are divine in outward view,
So be within, as fair, as good, as true,”¹

his mistress is not, as was Wither’s, Fair Virtue.

We have contrasted Carew’s spirit with that of the Elizabethans; in his two best lyrics their spirit is reflected, for they are Caroline in style, Elizabethan in their sentiment. The first two stanzas of “He that loves a rosy cheek” are worthy of the best traditions of Elizabethan song; the concluding stanza, utterly conventional, written in a different metre—it seems to be a most unhappy afterthought—is generally omitted in anthologies. Carew’s masterpiece rises beyond his mood of gallantry; its music is richer, its feeling deeper, and in its charm and grace we forget the courtier and hear only the poet:

“ Ask me no more where Jove bestows,
When June is past, the fading rose;
For in your beauty’s orient deep
These flowers, as in their causes, sleep.

“ Ask me no more whither do stray
The golden atoms of the day;
For in pure love heaven did prepare
Those powders to enrich your hair.

“ Ask me no more if east or west
The phoenix builds her spicy nest;
For unto you at last she flies,
And in your fragrant bosom dies.”²

One of Carew’s intimate friends at court was Sir John Suckling (1609-1642). He studied at Cambridge, where he was known as “a polite but not a deep scholar”; travelled

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

² P. 141. The popularity of this poem is shown by the fact that it was turned into a political song. See *A Collection of Royal Songs written against the Rump Parliament*, London, 1731, vol. I, p. 41. See also the imitations and answers in the reprint of *Musarum Deliciæ. Wit Restored*, etc., London, N. D., vol. I, pp. 229-234.

abroad for three years; and joined the forty English gentlemen volunteers who fought under Gustavus Adolphus. In 1632 he returned to Whitehall, where his gaiety, his wit, and his lavish expenditures made him a favorite. He was a spendthrift; he squandered his fortune; and to repair his losses, became a reckless gambler, the gossip of the day asserting that he stooped to dishonorable methods to win. Certain it is that his court life ruined him. For the Scottish expedition he raised a company of one hundred horse, gorgeously equipped at his own costs, but its career was brief and inglorious. Henrietta Maria admired Suckling—he had much of the Gallic brilliancy—and at her instigation he engaged in a plot to rescue Strafford from the Tower, but his plans were discovered and he fled to Paris, where he died in poverty and obscurity. The Puritans did their best to blacken his memory; in the anonymous *News from Rome* (1641), we are told that he had plotted to restore Catholicism. The Pope, speaking of Englishmen, declares:

“ But some there are who to me faithful were,
But they are gone, th’ are fled I know not where;
My Goldfinch, Windebanke, my Suckling young,
Who could so well pray in our Roman tongue;
Are gone for fear of chiding; O they would
Have elevated me, if that they could.”

Suckling's poems, as Carew's, were published posthumously; unlike Carew's, many of them bear the evident marks of hasty composition. If we accept Suckling's own assertion, he had little regard for the art of writing, for “he loved not the Muses so well as his sport,” yet we feel in reading him that he never showed the better side of his nature; that he was more thoughtful and sincere than he appears in his verses.¹ That the finest writing appealed to

¹ A. H. Thompson, *The Works of Sir John Suckling*, London, 1910, p. 11.

him is shown by his preference for Shakespeare. He is one of the few men of that age who repeatedly expresses an admiration for him; he imitates him in his plays, writes supplementary verses for *Lucrece*, refers to him in a letter as "my friend, Mr. William Shakespeare," and is painted by Van Dyck, holding a copy of the plays in his hand.¹ He knew Donne's poems, for certain of his phrases reappear in his own verses, and he has parodied Jonson's "Have you seen but a bright lily grow." He was then well acquainted with the work of the masters of lyric verse, yet he is not content to imitate them, but seeks a style of his own.

In *A Session of the Poets* Suckling declares that "A Laureat Muse should be easy and free"; he speaks admiringly of "gentle Shakespeare's easier strain," in another place. It is evident that his aim in verse was to appear straightforward, unaffected, and even careless. He would have deemed it an honor to be called one of the "mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease." His lyric Muse was not to be wooed but to be jested with; nothing must smell of the lamp, every verse must have the light, careless tone of improvisation. With such a method, if we may use so dignified a term, he naturally cared little for the point and polish of Carew. At times Suckling descends to epigram:

"Women enjoyed (whate'er before th' have been)
Are like romances read, or sights once seen:
Fruition's dull, and spoils the play much more
Than if one read or knew the plot before.
'Tis expectation makes a blessing dear;
Heaven were not heaven, if we knew what it were."²

This has the tone of the Augustan school, but such lines are not characteristic. His metres are the simplest, and if a verse were rough, or a rhyme false, it did not disturb him.

¹ Pp. 24, 332.

² P. 18.

As for "poetic diction," he scorned it. He adopted the conversational tone, and his language is that of everyday life, almost monosyllabic in its simplicity:

" I prithee send me back my heart,
Since I cannot have thine:
For if from yours you will not part,
Why then shouldst thou have mine?

" But love is such a mystery,
I cannot find it out:
For when I think I'm best resolved,
I then am in most doubt.

" Then farewell care, and farewell woe,
I will no longer pine:
For I'll believe I have her heart
As much as she hath mine."¹

In Congreve's *Way of the World*, Millimant, after repeating Suckling's

" I prithee spare me, gentle boy;
Press me no more for that slight toy,
That foolish trifle of an heart,"

exclaims "Natural, easy Suckling." He would have desired no higher praise.

His songs, set to music by Henry Lawes, are almost entirely love poems, quite different in spirit from the lyrics of the Elizabethans or from those of his friend Carew. Pope's line altered to "Love is a jest, and all things show it" might well be the motto for these light-hearted effusions, too trifling in their tone to be contemptuous or even cynical. The sonneteers loved to display their griefs; Suckling informs the "whining lover" that compared to his sufferings, "A finger

burnt's as great a pain." Love is troublesome, but so are debts:

" 'Tis only being in love and debt that breaks us of our rest;
And he that is quite out of both, of all the world is blest."

There is no lover's melancholy in the moods of this poet; he haunts no "fall of fountains on a pathless grove," but is satisfied with Blackfrairs and Whitehall. He never rises hungry from the table from "much gazing on her face," as he declares in a poem with the characteristic refrain:

" She's fair, she's wondrous fair,
But I care not who know it,
Ere I'll die for love, I'll fairly forego it."

The Elizabethans protested eternal devotion; three days' constancy is a miracle of faithfulness to Suckling:

" Out upon it! I have loved
Three whole days together,
And am like to love three more,
If it prove fair weather."¹

His chief maxim in love is that fruition spoils all; admire at a distance and care little; the very essence of his spirit is contained in "Why so pale and wan, fond lover."

More distinctly than Carew, Suckling points to the Restoration lyric; he foretells the "town" in his mention of patches, masks and hackney coaches; his wit, too, is not the wit of Donne, for he has much of our modern humor:

" The little boy, to show his might and power,
Turned Io to a cow, Narcissus to a flower;
Transformed Apollo to a homely swain,
And Jove himself into a golden rain.
Such shapes were tolerable, but by th' mass!
He's metamorphosed me into an ass."²

¹ Pp. 23, 48, 47, 45.

² P. 62.

Modern also are the little humorous touches in his masterpiece, *The Ballad upon a Wedding*, which portrays in a few strokes the point of view of a country yokel: the ring too large for the bride's finger, looking

" Like the great collar (just)
About our young colt's neck; "

the comparison of the red and white of the bride's face to the daisy or the streaks

" Such as are on a Katherne pear
(The side that's next the sun). " ¹

There is more dramatic characterization in these few stanzas than in all his three plays.

We have said that Suckling concealed beneath his jesting a finer nature than the world granted to him; we see the deeper side of his character in

" When, dearest, I but think of thee,
Methinks all things that lovely be
Are present, and my soul delighted: " ²

a poem written with unmistakable feeling and expressing not the gallantry of Carew but a manly devotion. The world remembers him only as a wit and a trifle, the author of "The Devil take her"; he openly slighted the Muse and this is the retribution of such a rash contempt.

Richard Lovelace (1618-1658) studied at Oxford; followed the King in the unfortunate Scottish expeditions of 1639 and 1640; and prominently identified himself with the Royalists by presenting to Parliament in 1642 the Kentish

¹ P. 30. This poem won instant popularity; it constantly appears in the verse collections and song books of the Restoration. Robert Baron has an interesting adaptation of it in his *Pocula Castalia*, 1650, pp. 66-72. He was a warm admirer of Suckling and has two epigrams on "the sweetest plant in the Pierian green."

² P. 67.

petition, praying for the restoration of the Bishops, Liturgy, and Prayer Book. For this act he was imprisoned in the Gate House seven weeks, a fortunate punishment, for it led him to compose *To Althea from Prison*. On his release, he followed the fortunes of the King; took refuge on the continent, where he fought in the service of Louis XIV; and returning to England, was again imprisoned in 1648. To beguile the tedium of captivity he prepared his poems for publication, and they were issued under the title of *Lucasta* in 1649. He was released this same year; he had given everything to the royal cause; and he died in poverty if not in actual want, in 1659. From these simple facts of the poet's life, it is difficult to understand the admiration he inspired in his contemporaries. His character did not find adequate expression, for he was neither a distinguished soldier nor a great poet. Winstanley, writing a quarter of a century after Lovelace's death, pays an exaggerated tribute to him, yet it shows the judgment of his generation: "I can compare no man so like this Colonel Lovelace as Sir Philip Sidney . . . both of them endued with transcendent sparks of poetic fire, and both of them exposing their lives to the extremest hazard of doubtful war."¹

As a lyric poet, Lovelace is singularly disappointing. He has won immortality with two songs, whose note is not heard again in all his writings. The two poems to *Lucasta* entitled *Going beyond the Seas* and *The Rose*, are well-written lyrics; they stand out above the rest of his work, but they have no touch of that nobility of feeling which distinguishes "Tell me not, sweet," or "When Love with unconfined wings."² Like Suckling, he cared nothing for the painful process of revision; he is satisfied with such lines as "Thou thee that's thine dost discipline," but unlike Suckling, he can not assume a *déjà*

¹ *Lives of the most famous English Poets*, London, 1687, p. 170.

² *The Poems of Richard Lovelace*, Hutchinson's Popular Classics, London, 1906, pp. 17, 23, 18, 69.

air which persuades the reader to overlook defects of workmanship. Apparently Lovelace lacked the critical sense; he could not separate the good from the bad in his writing. *Amyntor's Grove* is utterly conventional and uninteresting, yet we find in it delicate and musical verses, which removed from their context, might have lived; in a verse epistle to *The Lady A. L.* occur lines, which printed alone, would form a graceful lyric, but in their context they are forgotten. Lacking Jonson's art, Lovelace is attracted by the wit of Donne, but his conceits are trivial. The patch on Lucasta's face is a bee seeking honey; the poet's heart is a ball for Cupid; the snail is an "epitome of Euclid," a warlike Scythian moving his men and cities, a hooded monk walking in his cloister—a quaint conceit which partially atones for the insipidity of the others. It can not be said then that Lovelace is identified with any school; he is a transitional writer and if we have a faint reminiscence of Donne's method, we have an anticipation of Dorset or Sedley in such a stanza as

" Oh, she is constant as the wind
 That revels in an evening's air!
 Certain, as ways unto the blind,
 More real than her flatteries are;
 Gentle, as chains that honour bind,
 More faithful than an Hebrew Jew,
 But as the Devil not half so true."¹

One trait of Lovelace that points to later writers is his observation of animal life; he watches with interest the ant, the grasshopper, the falcon, for Lovelace was not a courtier but a country gentleman. There is quiet humor in his address to the "great good husband, little ant":

" Down with thy double load of that one grain;
 It is a grainery for all thy train."

¹ P. 86; cf. *The Scrutiny*, p. 25.

Better still is his grasshopper that swings

“ upon the waving hair
Of some well filled oaten beard,
Drunk every night with a delicious tear
Dropt thee from Heaven, where now th’art reared.”¹

The tone of these poems recalls the fieldmouse of Robert Burns.

In his two best lyrics, Lovelace has caught the finest spirit of Elizabethan chivalry. “Tell me not, sweet,” is the better known, because of its concluding stanza, but it is not the better poem. Though it is an ungracious task to criticise an acknowledged classic, if we look critically at the second stanza we find that its wit—

“ True; a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field;”—

seems a little out of place, and unworthy of the rest of the song. *To Althea* is a more sustained piece of writing; it has a broader sweep:

“ When (like committed linnets) I
With shriller throat shall sing
The sweetness, mercy, majesty,
And glories of my King;
When I shall voice aloud how good
He is, how great should be,
Enlarged winds that curl the flood
Know no such liberty.”

Such a stanza contains the very essence of that unswerving loyalty which the Stuarts were destined to inspire. For more than a century that devotion found expression in the finest political lyrics that any literature possesses; the humor

¹ Pp. 125, 35.

and pathos, the tenderness, the enthusiasm, the spirit of daring that animates these Jacobite songs won many a follower to a desperate cause and their effect on the modern lyric has been no small one. Scott and Burns owe some of their finest stanzas to the forgotten writers of these deeply felt poems.

Lowell, who constantly showed towards the lesser poets a certain lofty impatience, has characterized *Lucasta* as "dirt and dullness." The first charge is unfair, for Lovelace is free from the sensual taint that mars Carew's poems; on the other hand, it must be admitted that many of his poems are wearisome reading. There is no half way point in his writings; he reaches the two extremes, and in the greater part of his book the worse prevails. Ten lyrics, at the most, are worthy of remembrance; it is a small number, yet two of these are the finest expression in our language of the love, honor, and loyalty of the Cavaliers.

We may consider at this point a group of minor poets, who were outspoken Royalists. William Cartwright (1611-1643) and Henry King (1592-1669), Bishop of Chichester, enjoyed in their day a considerable reputation, yet they are by no means inspired writers and their few lyrics need not detain us.¹ Alexander Brome (1620-1666) had three themes—love, loyalty, and above all, wine. His songs, written to be sung in the tavern or the camp, have small literary merit, but their lively style made them popular. His love poems, of which the *Resolve* is the best, adopt the attitude of Suckling, for Brome imitates him freely. He is indeed the laureate of wine; he sings the praises of claret and canary, sack and ale in no uncertain tones; and even in his Royalist lyrics he seems ready to lay aside the sword for the bottle. The Cavalier in prison consoles himself readily:

¹ Cartwright's best poem, *Valediction*, is not included in the *Oxford Book of English Verse* which prints King's touching elegy upon his wife, one of the sincerest poems of the age. There is need of a new edition of King.

“Come pass about the bowl to me,
A health to our distressed King;
Though we’re in hold, let cups go free,
Birds in a cage may freely sing.”¹

Perhaps the most attractive feature of these poems is their recklessness. Without a doubt they inspired devotion for the Stuarts, and Isaac Walton tells us in an “humble Eglog” that these are the songs

“that we
Have sung so oft and merilie,
As we have marched to fight the cause
Of God’s annointed, and our laws.”

War songs are seldom effective in proportion to their literary merit.²

A much more important figure is John Cleveland (1613-1658), fellow of St. Johns, Cambridge, and for “about the space of nine years, the delight and ornament of that society.” Driven from his college by the Puritans, he followed the King, fighting valiantly with his pen. His satire, *The Rebel Scot*, was one of the most effective blows struck by either side.

Cleveland’s poems on Jonson express the warmest admiration, but he was attracted by the satiric rather than by the lyric element in the elder poet’s work. He attacks more often than he sings. In his descriptive poems and in his satires he adopts the “metaphysical” manner; in his few lyrics—none are included in such anthologies as Palgrave’s *Golden Treasury* or the *Oxford Book of English Verse*—he shows more vivacity than “wit.” *The General Eclipse*

¹ A. Brome, *Songs and other Poems*, third edition, 1668, p. 50.

² If any proof of this statement is needed, it is only necessary to remember that the doggerel, “When the King enjoys his own again,” was the most popular song of the age. Ritson called it the most famous song of any time or country.

is an interesting parody on Wotton's best lyric, "Ye meaner beauties of the night"; *Mark Antony*, with its good opening:

"When as the nightingale chanted her vespers
And the wild forester couched on the ground,"

has a lilt that foretells the Restoration song books and D'Urfey:

"First on her cherry cheeks I mine eyes feasted,
Thence fear of surfeiting made me retire;
Next on her warmer lips, which, when I tasted,
My duller spirits made active as fire.
Then we began to dart,
Each at another's heart,
Arrows that knew no smart,
Sweet lips and smiles between.
Never Mark Antony
Dallied more wantonly
With the fair Egyptian Queen."¹

We leave the minor poetry of the period with a brief notice of two other well-known writers. Thomas Randolph (1605-1635) was in residence at Cambridge until 1632, when he forsook the university for London, attracted by the pleasures of the town and by the reigning poets, especially Jonson. He enjoyed life too recklessly and died before he had justified his reputation as a highly gifted and brilliant writer. He lives in a single lyric, his delightful *Ode to Master Stafford to hasten Him into the Country*, one of the best poems on pastoral life written during this whole century. Randolph is tired with "the chargeable noise of this great town," weary of foppery and the war of wits:

"'Tis time that I grow wise, when all the world grows mad,"

¹ John M. Berdan, *The Poems of John Cleveland*, New Haven, 1911, pp. 158, 102.

he cries, and so he spurs away to see "old simplicity," to watch "the wholesome country girls make hay," and to hear the choir of birds. There is nothing conventional in such writing; every verse rings true.

Thomas Stanley (1625-1678) wrote many songs; over eighty of them were given a musical setting by John Gamble in his *Ayres and Dialogues*, 1657, who finds that they possess "flowing and natural graces" for the words are "pure harmony in themselves." Though correctly written, these lyrics lack the inward touch; they are of the school of Carew, yet have neither his charm nor sentiment. With Donne, Stanley writes of a bracelet of hair, "This mystic wreath which crowns my arm," but his verses are merely a formal compliment. At his best he has something of Jonson's simple, direct style in the *Relapse*, or in the song:

"I prithee let my heart alone!

Since now 'tis raised above thee:

Not all the beauty thou dost own

Again can make me love thee."¹

III

The greatest of Jonson's sons was Robert Herrick (1591-1674), in turn a goldsmith's apprentice, a student at Cambridge, a poet at London dependent on the patronage of courtiers, a chaplain to Buckingham's expedition to the Isle of Rhé, and finally a country parson, vicar of Dean Prior, Devonshire. He was a Royalist at heart; in several poems he expresses attachment to the King and his cause, yet he mourns over the troubled times principally because they are untunable and unfit for song. After nineteen years at Dean Prior, he was ejected by the Puritans in 1648, and returning to London, brought out that same year his *Hesperides*. In 1662 he was restored to his vicarage, where he died in 1674,

¹ L. I. Guiney, *Thomas Stanley*, Hull, 1907, p. 65.

the year of Milton's death. He published but one poem, and that a poor one, after the appearance of the *Hesperides*.¹

In a previous chapter, we spoke of the neglect that overtook Shakespeare's sonnets; the *Hesperides* had even a harder fate. Quite contrary to the custom of the day, they were published without any commendatory verses. Though Herrick was a son of Ben and addresses him most familiarly, Jonson never mentions his name; he is not included in Suckling's *Session of the Poets*, and the earliest allusion to the *Hesperides*, a Latin couplet prefixed to *Lucasta*, actually ranks Lovelace with Herrick. Three lines in the *Musarum Deliciæ* (1655); a really appreciative stanza in *Naps upon Parnassus* (1658);² a ridiculously patronizing reference in Phillips's *Theatrum Pætarum Anglorum* (1675) is all that we hear of Herrick until 1796, when some articles concerning him appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. To show how completely he had been forgotten, when Giles Jacobs brought out in 1723 his *Poetical Register, or Lives of all the English Poets*, though he was assisted by Congreve, "the celebrated Mr. Prior," and many others, no one had heard of Herrick's name. Scores of poetasters are noticed in this work; Herrick had passed entirely from the memories of English poets and readers, one more illustration of the vanity of contemporary criticism.

Though the world of letters long neglected him, though the fame he desired was long delayed, the unlettered peasants repeated his verses; his wassail and harvest songs, his Christmas glees, were handed down from father to son. There must have been many country squires who, with Irving's host

¹ *The New Charon. Upon the Death of Henry Lord Hastings.*

² "And then Flaccus Horace,
He was but a sour-ass,
And good for nothing but Lyrics.
There's but one to be found
In all English ground,
Writes as well, who is hight Robert Herrick."

at Bracebridge Hall, would have nothing but "Herrick's good old English songs." In 1810, a visitor at Dean Prior found a woman of ninety years who had repeated from childhood Herrick's *Litany*, and knew a few traditions concerning the poet; as late as 1843 Mr. King wrote: "Many of the spells, charms, bits of folk lore that are scattered through his volumes are still to be found in his parish and in a flourishing condition."¹

Though the *Hesperides* had no effect upon the development of the lyric, Herrick drew inspiration from the classic lyric and from the songs of Jonson. Catullus, Ovid, Martial, Theocritus, Anacreon, are easily discernible in his poems, sometimes in direct translation, oftener by allusion or free imitation. It is with Horace that he has the closest affinity, for with as much art and with greater color and feeling, he repeats the Horatian warnings of the inevitable approach of death and of the brief time given us to pluck the joys of life. This classical influence never fetters him; there is not the slightest air of pedantry in his imitations; and his translations, especially those of Anacreon, in their lightness and graceful finish rank with his best work.

It is a rather remarkable fact that the greatest of the sons of Ben was not a dramatist but a lyric poet. Herrick leaves no doubt as to his indebtedness to the "best of poets," whom, in his *Elysium*, he places above Catullus, Pindar and Homer, and the number and nature of his references to his "father Ben" can hardly be paralleled in the case of any other poet of the period and one of his followers. They express more than friendship and admiration; Herrick asks Jonson to aid him "when he a verse would make," and these words are not altogether figurative. From Jonson's *Underwoods*, and *Forest*, Herrick, to use his own phrase, has "adopted" several poems and at times the imitation is very exact. As has been often pointed out, "Still to be neat, still to be drest," evi-

¹ *Quarterly Review*, 1810; *Fraser's Magazine*, vol. 47, p. 103.

dently inspired Herrick's charming poems on clothes—"When I behold a forest spread," and "A sweet disorder in the dress,"¹—while "Drink to me only with thine eyes" re-echoes in Herrick's:

"Reach, with your whiter hands to me
Some crystal of the spring;
And I about the cup shall see
Fresh lilies flourishing.

"Or else, sweet nymphs, do you but this,
To th' glass your lips incline;
And I shall see by that one kiss
The water turned to wine."

Or, more plainly, in:

"'Twas but a single rose,
Till you on it did breathe,
But since, methinks, it shows
Not so much rose as wreath."²

Herrick's exquisite *Night-Piece to Julia* far surpasses the following song from Jonson's masque, *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*, though certainly modeled upon it:

"The faery beam upon you,
The stars to glister on you;
A moon of light,
In the noon of night,
Till the fire-drake hath o'ergone you."¹

To point out actual imitation, similarities in thought and diction, does not bring us to the heart of the matter; it is more important to notice how completely Herrick escaped

¹ A. W. Pollard, *Herrick's Works, Muses' Library*, London, 1891, vol. 1, pp. 254, 32, 232.

² Pp. 232, 61.

the influence of Donne. Though he loves to play with a subject, to repeat with variations one idea, there are scarcely a dozen poems in the *Hesperides* containing strained conceits or fantastic ingenuity of thought. This may well be due to Jonson's influence and it is certain that Herrick's self-critical spirit, his sense of art, was fostered by Jonson's precept and practice. In no small degree, Jonson's fame as a lyric poet will rest upon this fact. Since in this instance the disciple is above his master, we may apply to the verses of Herrick the line which Jonson placed over his own child's grave:

"Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry."¹

Whether or not Herrick is our foremost lyric poet is a subject for critical discussion; that he is one of our foremost artists is unquestionable. Because at times he condescended to carve cherry stones; because he illuminated the pages of a manuscript when others spread whole landscapes on their canvas, we should not forget how remarkable is his technique. He lacked romantic passion, he was not one of those who had loved much, but to some men art is as real a mistress as one of flesh and blood; to certain natures, the beauty of a splendid line of poetry appeals as strongly as the beauty of a fair face. Endowed with artistic perception above his fellows, able to give to his songs the crowning touch, he had that rarest gift—the power to conceal his art. In his *Farewell to Sack* he exclaims

"what's done by me
Hereafter shall smell of the lamp, not thee,"

but he belies himself, and so supreme is his skill that song after song seems to be unpremeditated, full of those "name-

¹ I have discussed this more fully in "Herrick's Indebtedness to Ben Jonson," *Modern Language Notes*, December, 1902.

less graces that no art can teach." In Elizabethan poetry, we find splendid lyrical passages, unforgettable lines that we may detach from their setting, but Herrick's poems are complete. We cast aside the last stanza of Carew's "He that loves a rosy cheek," or of Browne's "Underneath this sable hearse"; we discard line after line of Crashaw's *Wishes to his supposed Mistress*, and thereby improve indisputably these poems, but we would not touch a syllable in *To Meadows*, *To Cœnone*, *To Anthea*—the list is an unending one. Herrick's aim never exceeded his reach; he kept in sight perfection and obtained it. There are in the *Hesperides* no lines more significant than the simple couplet:

"Better 'twere my book were dead,
Than to live not perfected."¹

Herrick's volume consisted of two parts—the *Hesperides* and the *Noble Numbers, or His Pious Pieces*. His religious poems are distinctly inferior to his secular verse, for though a passage in his *Farewell to Poetry* apparently proves that he voluntarily took orders, not driven to the priesthood by need, yet his *Farewell to Sack* has more feeling in it than we find in all but a few of his sacred poems.² He has none of Herbert's spiritual conflicts, nothing of Vaughan's mysticism or of Crashaw's glowing emotion. Keenly sensitive to the beautiful, it is a material loveliness that attracts him, and his religion is one of incense and of floral offerings. This absence of mysticism is best seen in a little poem on the Communion, where Herrick looks chiefly at the golden altar with its covering of figured damask.³ There is a simplicity of spirit in his religious verse that recalls the lyrics of the miracle plays:

¹ Vol. I, p. 59.

² Vol. II, p. 265, a poem not included in the *Hesperides*; vol. I, p. 53.

³ Vol. II, p. 191.

“Go, pretty child, and bear this flower
Unto thy little Saviour;

* * * * *

And tell Him, for good handsel too,
That thou hast brought a whistle new,
Made of a clean straight oaten reed,
To charm His cries at time of need.”¹

He sings the birth of Prince Charles in much the same way, and his shepherds bring the same offerings to him. Herrick’s carols are especially good, with their quaint touches, as when he calls Christ the “Lord of all this revelling,” or

“Our pretty twelfth-tide King,

* * * * *

And when night comes we’ll give him wassailing.”²

Mr. Gosse has pointed out that Herrick is at his best when his religious poems are most secular, when he can describe the flowers brought to Christ or sing a dirge for Jephthah’s daughter. He is the artist who makes the shrine, not the saint who kneels before it. He wishes in his old age some hermitage where

“the remnant of my days I’d spend,
Reading Thy Bible and my Book; so end.”³

The order is significant, and we suspect that Herrick’s reading would be chiefly the *Hesperides*.

There are in the *Noble Numbers* several poems marked by the sincerest feeling—poems of repentance and gratitude. His material view of life makes his *Thanksgiving to God for*

¹ No. 59.

² Pp. 206, 208.

³ P. 213.

his House one of his finest pieces. In the hands of many writers the list he gives of his humble possessions would be ineffective, even grotesque:

“ The worts, the purslain, and the mess
Of water cress,

* * * * *

Thou mak'st my teeming hen to lay
Her egg each day.”¹

In his *Litany to the Holy Spirit*, he shows an intensity of emotion which does not appear elsewhere in his verse:

“ When the flames and hellish cries
Fright mine ears, and fright mine eyes,
And all terrors me surprise,
Sweet Spirit, comfort me!”²

Such lines sound strangely amid the songs of flowers and spices.

It is in the *Hesperides* that Herrick's art finds its most perfect expression. Whatever he owed to the classic writers or to his “Saint Ben,” he is one of the most original of lyrists, and his province is all his own. He had no followers in his own day; in our own times, he has no imitators, for the objectivity of so much of his work is alien to our mood. Yet the personal note in his writings is decidedly modern, and modern too is his love for nature. Herrick's parish was a small one; his people “rude and churlish as the sea”; and it is scarcely difficult to understand the inconsistencies in his lyrics, his praise of Devonshire mingled at times with expressions of utter contempt for it. Cut off from his London friends and lyric feasts, he turned with genuine delight to

¹ P. 184.

² P. 181.

the rustic life about him. Though his Julias and Dianemes live in a world of fancy, a world of spices and silks, there is no conventionality in his songs of the country. He saw more in the pastoral life than did his contemporaries, yet his vision was limited, for he is the singer of meadows and of blossoms. There is a refinement in his descriptive touches, a delicacy in his flower songs quite different from the heartiness of Heywood's "Pack clouds away and welcome day," yet this delicacy of treatment is far removed from artificiality, and though he sought for new and difficult verse forms, they never restrained his thought nor impeded the song-like flow of his style. There are no more exquisite lines on flowers than *To Primroses*, *To Daffodils*, or *To Blossoms*. They combine the triumph of art—the songs themselves are as fragile as the flowers they celebrate—with a sympathy, and a tenderness for the short-lived "whimpering younglings."

Herrick has been reproached for lacking that strength of emotion seen in the songs of the Elizabethans, and it is said that many a minor lyricist has shown a depth of feeling he never reached. When he so wished, he could write a spirited love song:

"Thou art my life, my love, my heart,
The very eyes of me:
And hast command of every part
To live and die for thee,"¹

but as he concealed his art, so he chose to conceal his emotion. He has been called a trifler, but there is too much pathos in his work to justify that epithet. He is the singer of flowers and meadows, but his songs are elegies. We think of him as the poet of May and of the joys of fields and woods, but he never forgets the fast-approaching end of all that charms him:

¹ Vol. I, p. 135.

“ But you are lovely leaves, where we
May read how soon things have
Their end, though ne’er so brave:
And after they have shown their pride
Like you awhile, they glide
Into the grave.”¹

His emotion is the more poignant because it is restrained. With all his love for the earth, with his delight in jewels, silks and spices, he can not lose sight of the shadow of death. His mistresses in their taffetas and laces, fragrant with those perfumes that so pleased him, are flowers blooming for the moment:

“ You are a tulip seen to-day,
But, dearest, of so short a stay
That where you grew, scarce man can say.”²

He can not rid himself of this thought; he recurs to it again and again, expressing it nowhere more perfectly than in “Sweet, be not proud of those two eyes.” As he gazes on the beauty of Dianeme, he bids her forget the star-light sparkle of her eyes, the wealth of her rich hair, for her ruby

“ Will last to be a precious stone
When all your world of beauty’s gone.”³

Here is no graceful compliment, no gallant serenade, but a lament at the irony of fate, the tragedy of life. In a poem containing his finest qualities—his love of nature, his graceful description, his musical expression—we find the same note. After he has pictured to Corinna the loveliness

¹ P. 221.

² P. 108.

³ P. 74.

of the May day, the pleasures of the budding boys and girls gone a-Maying, he forgets the spring and its flowers:

“ Our life is short, and our days run
As fast away as does the sun.
And, as a vapour or a drop of rain
Once lost, can ne’er be found again,
So when or you or I are made
A fable, song, or fleeting shade,
All love, all liking, all delight
Lies drowned with us in endless night.
Then, while time serves, and we are but decaying,
Come, my Corinna, come, let’s go a-Maying.”¹

The poet who stands nearest Herrick in his love of nature—at times he surpasses him—is Andrew Marvell (1621-1678). He was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, travelled on the continent, and in 1650 was taken by Lord Fairfax to his Yorkshire estate, to be the tutor of his daughter. Here, in the retirement of the country, Marvell composed his finest poems *Upon Appleton House*, the *Horatian Ode*, *The Garden*, *On a Drop of Dew*, and in all probability, *The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn*. Fairfax delighted in poetry, but could not write it, though he made many attempts. Undoubtedly he encouraged Marvell, but the young tutor’s lyric period was a brief one. As Milton’s colleague in the Latin secretaryship, and later, as member of Parliament from Hull, he became absorbed in politics; in place of nature poems, he wrote verse satires, brutally frank, or pamphlets full of vigorous, ironical prose. English history gained a patriot at a time when honesty and courage seemed forgotten virtues; the English lyric is the poorer since it possesses not the achievement, but the promise of Andrew Marvell.

If Herrick avoided Donne’s influence, Marvell shows it most plainly. He never mentions Donne’s name; he does

not imitate any one poem, or even lift any phrase, but the spirit of Donne is in many a line. At times he can be as fantastic as any of the metaphysical poets:

“Tears (watery shot that pierce the mind,)
And sighs (Love’s cannon filled with wind;)”

and the Dean of St. Paul’s might have written such stanzas as:

“My love is of a birth as rare
As ’tis, for object, strange and high;
It was begotten by Despair,
Upon Impossibility.

* * * * *

“As lines, so love’s oblique, may well
Themselves in every angle greet:
But ours, so truly parallel,
Though infinite, can never meet.”¹

As a rule Marvell’s conceits are quaint and charming rather than extravagant and grotesque. We see this in such a couplet as

“And stars show lovely in the night,
But as they seem the tears of light,”²

and better in these stanzas from *The Mower to the Glow Worms*:

“Ye living lamps, by whose dear light
The nightingale does sit so late,
And studying all the summer night,
Her matchless songs does imitate;

¹ G. A. Aitken, *Poems of Andrew Marvell*, *Muses’ Library*, London, 1892, pp. 31, 73, 74.

² P. 37. Cf. Sully Prudhomme, *La Voie Lactée*:

“Êtes-vous toujours en prière?
Êtes-vous des astres blessés?
Car ce sont des pleurs de lumière,
Non des rayons, que vous versez.”

"Ye country comets, that portend
 No war nor prince's funeral,
 Shining unto no higher end
 Than to presage the grass's fall."¹

Such verses show plainly what Lamb has called the "witty delicacy" of Marvell.

The themes of Marvell are not those of Donne; he lacked the romantic temperament and writes coldly of women. Only one of his love poems is worthy of him; it has something of Donne's wit, and far more important, fine moments of imagination and passion, for Marvell is continually hinting at greater things. His *Coy Mistress* has the same theme as Herrick's *Corinna*, but not Herrick's art. Contrasted with this poem, Marvell's octosyllabics are rough and unfinished; his humor seems out of keeping and too grotesque. He tells his coy love that the days haste away; if there were time

"I would
 Love you ten years before the flood,
 And you should, if you please, refuse
 Till the conversion of the Jews."

Then, in this quaint tirade, he pauses and cries with an intensity of emotion which Herrick never expressed:

"But at my back I always hear
 Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near,
 And yonder all before us lie
 Deserts of vast eternity.

* * * * *

Let us roll all our strength and all
 Our sweetness up into one ball,
 And tear our pleasures with rough strife,
 Thorough the iron gates of life."²

¹ P. 89.

² Pp. 56, 57.

Never again does this mood seize him; instead of love poems, he writes verses to children, "young beauties of the woods."

If Marvell forsook the greatest lyric theme of all, he at least brought new ones to English verse. Through the Elizabethan period, when Italian influence was supreme, the patriotism of the Italian sonneteers was never imitated; we have no sonnets, no odes to England or to English leaders, whereas the Italian poets took the deepest interest in the political fortunes of their towns or provinces. Marvell considered Cromwell to be the savior of his country; moved by the sincerest admiration for him he became his laureate. Where other poets flattered subserviently, he praised boldly and, on the whole, justly, though he is not free from certain absurd touches of adulation. We can hardly call his elegy on Cromwell a lyric, for it is rather a descriptive poem, rising at times to a Miltonic diction:

"When up the armèd mountains of Dunbar
He marched, and through deep Severn, ending war,"

with lines that move with the rugged strength of Cromwell's Ironsides:

"Thee, many ages hence, in martial verse
Shall the English soldier, ere he charge, rehearse;"¹

but his *Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland* falls well within our province. It is one of the most successful attempts to reproduce in English the effect of Horace's close-knit stanzas. Abandoning the experiment of forcing English thought into a Latin metre—a *tour de force* which diverts the reader's mind from the substance of the poem—he uses his own difficult measure with such success that we forget his metrical skill in admiring the nobility of thought and the dignity of expression as he praises the man

¹ Pp. 160, 165.

“ Who from his private gardens, where
He lived reservèd and austere
(As if his highest plot
To plant the bergamot;)

“ Could by industrious valour climb
To ruin the great work of time,
And cast the kingdoms old,
Into another mould.”¹

It is more than a century before the English lyric can equal this.

Turning to Marvell's nature poems, we find their spirit astonishingly modern; he views nature not as an artist but as a lover. He belonged to his generation, for he was the poet of meadows and woods, and with Howell regarded mountains as “hook-shouldered excrescences.” Summer was his season; the warm earth with its flowers and fruits, his delight; he says little of sky or clouds. Keen in his observation, nature is to him an end; his descriptions are not ornaments to his poems. There is all the languor and luxury of a summer's day in the tropical richness of his *Garden*. Here and in his *Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn*, he has the sensuousness of Keats. “I stood tip-toe upon a little hill” is more delicate; it has a greater wealth of detail and a finer finish; but its spirit differs in no wise from that of Marvell's verses.

But Marvell sees more than the loveliness of the earth; he has a touch of that transcendentalism that characterizes our modern conception of nature. Overpowered by the beauty about him he cries, in Wordsworth's spirit:

“ Thrice happy he, who, not mistook,
Hath read in Nature's mystic book!”

¹ P. 134.

poems contain more conceits than *Sunday*—the sabbath is man's face while the week days are his body; Sundays are the pillars of Heaven's palace while the other days are the empty spaces between them; Sundays are the pearls threaded to adorn the bride of God—yet Walton asserts that Herbert sang this song on his deathbed. He has many conceits that mar his work—we could do without the comparison of spring to a box of sweetmeats in "Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright"—yet they are an essential element in his writing.

Like Donne, Herbert is impatient of melody; his verse is grave and lacks the sweetness of Crashaw's hymns. Though full of striking felicities of phrase, his lyrics are rarely metrically perfect throughout. He knew the work of the sonnet-eers and in the style of their sonnets on sleep he composed one on prayer:

"Prayer, the Churches banquet, angel's age,
 God's breath in man returning to his birth,
 The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
 The Christian plummet sounding heaven and earth;"¹

but there is little of Elizabethan music here. His most impressive sonnet, *My comforts drop and melt like snow*, has a splendid opening and is suffused with the deepest feeling, but it too, drops and melts into such a line as "But cooling by the way, grows palsy and slow."² He envied, so he said, "no man's nightingale or spring"; he lacks the graces of his contemporaries; yet *The Quip*, *The Collar*, *Virtue*, have a music rarer than the facile strains of the earlier age. At his best he has a sober harmony that grows in impressiveness the more it is heard, for with few exceptions, the musical appeal of Herbert's verse is not an immediate one.

The great value of Herbert's lyrics consists in their reve-

¹ G. H. Palmer, *English Works of George Herbert*, Boston, 1905, vol. II, p. 181.

² P. 351.

lation of his character, for the religious lyric gains in power according to the degree in which it discloses a man's soul. In many of the lyrics we see the struggle for holiness, but more impressive is his struggle for peace; this it is that makes him such a human figure. The average man does not long for spiritual perfection, but he does desire the calm and steadfast mind. What Herbert could not say from the pulpit he wrote in his lyrics. Of a noble family, the friend of courtiers and the King, famed for his scholarship and wit, he found himself ministering to the needs of fifty peasants—his little church would not hold more. He could not forget the things of earth, his old dreams and hopes of worldly greatness; he is "full of rebellion," and longs to fight, to travel, to deny his service.¹ Sickness and doubt overtake him; he has drunk from a bitter bowl; he believes his nature has been thwarted:

"Whereas my birth and spirit rather took
The way that takes the town,
Thou didst betray me to a lingering book,
And wrap me in a gown."

He feels that he has accomplished nothing in the world, that the struggle naught availeth:

"Now I am here, what thou wilt do with me
None of my books will show.
I read, and sigh, and wish I were a tree,
For sure then I should grow
To fruit or shade. At least some bird would trust
Her household to me, and I should be just."²

He is constantly reproaching himself with his empty days; the very plants and bees do more than he:

"Poor bees that work all day
Sting my delay."

¹ P. 303.

² P. 339.

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To fruit or shade. At least some bird would trust
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He is constantly reproaching himself with his empty days; the very plants and bees do more than he:

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¹ P. 303.

² P. 339.

When, moreover, we remember that the world and its train-bands still call him; that Beauty creeps into a rose and tempts him; that he feels the scorn of "proud Wit and Contemplation," we can understand why he writes so often on affliction. The frankness of these poems points to a new era in the lyric; Herbert conceals nothing, and his heart, so he tells us, bleeds on his writing.

It must not be presumed that these lyrics are depressing reading; with few exceptions they are not morbid, for Herbert has reconciled these unhappy experiences with a divine plan to bring the soul to felicity. This restlessness and discontent is thrust upon him to draw his soul to God:

"If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast."¹

The lyrics of the *Temple* lead not to pessimism but to hope.

Looking at the lyrics from the artistic standpoint, *Virtue*, to which Isaac Walton has given a perfect prose setting, deserves its popularity, for it is the most beautiful of all his poems. *The Elixir* is equally well known, because of those lines quoted as frequently as Pope's epigrams:

"Who sweeps a room but for thy cause
Makes that and the action fine,"

but more characteristic than either of these two lyrics is *Man*. It has his peculiar music, his quaintness of style, and deep thought:

"Man is all symmetry,
Full of proportions, one limb to another,
And all to all the world besides.
Each part may call the farthest, brother;
For head with foot hath private amity,
And both, with moons and tides."²

¹ Vol. III, p. 149.

² Vol. II, p. 217.

The lyrics of Herbert make a man look more deeply both into his own heart and into the world about him.

Richard Crashaw (1613?-1649), son of a bitter opponent of Rome, was driven by the Puritans in 1644 from Peterhouse, Cambridge, where he was a fellow. He turned Catholic, fled to Italy, and died a lay priest at the famous shrine of Loretto. He lived far from the world; his life history is a series of spiritual experiences to be read in his poems. He never stands apart from his work; his sensitive and emotional temperament is disclosed in every page of his writings. He fell on evil days, yet even in a time of peace his story would have been a simple one—that of a dreamer and a recluse.

During the twelve years Crashaw spent at Cambridge, he came under the influence of Spanish mysticism and chose Theresa of Avila as his Saint. When we say that her visions and ecstasies were his spiritual food, we have defined both his character and his poetry. He made St. Mary's church his home and offered there more prayers at night than others did in the day. Little Gidding is near Cambridge; he was a frequent visitor at this retreat; and the vigils and prayers of this household intensified his fervor. Many of his religious lyrics are not songs, but the impassioned cry of his soul; he writes hymns but they are too glowing and mystical to be hymns of the church. His sacred verse has never been adopted by English Catholics; it holds no such place as Herbert's *Temple*, which is read as much for its religious spirit as for its poetry.

It is not difficult to discover why Crashaw has a fit audience, but few. He declares that in spiritual matters there is no distinction of race or country. Speaking of St. Theresa he says:

“What soul soe'er, in any language, can
Speak Heaven like hers, is my soul's countryman.”

Yet fine as the thought may be, for most of us it is not the truth. With all his tolerance, the author of the *Religio Medici* realized that there was "a geography of religions as well as lands," and there is an unmistakable difference between English and Spanish religious thought and emotion. There have been English mystics since the days of Richard Rolle, yet Crashaw seems un-English. He has nothing of Quarles's dull morality, Herbert's expression of doubts and discouragements common to us all, or of Vaughan's moral interpretation of nature. His poems, the product of long fasts and prayers, are the work of an ascetic; they have a tropical air and seem to have been written under warmer skies. He fed on the mystical writings of St. Theresa until he trembles in his ecstasy; his fervor is unquestionably as sincere as it is intense, but to the lay mind its "immortal kisses," "flames," and "bleeding wounds" are somewhat incomprehensible. He sings of a spiritual love with

" Amorous languishments; luminous trances;
Spiritual and soul-piercing glances.

* * * * *

Delicious deaths, soft exhalations
Of soul; dear and divine annihilations."¹

Much nearer our modern thought are Newman's deprecations of these "brightest transports" which "bloom their hour and fade":

" But he who lets his feelings run
In soft luxurious flow,
Shrinks when hard service must be done,
And faints at every woe."²

¹ A. R. Waller, *Poems by Richard Crashaw*, Cambridge, 1904, p. 280.

² *Flowers without Fruit*.

If we consider the artistic import of these lyrics, we find them brilliant in color, musical in their expression, and thrilling in an emotional power that recalls Shelley and Swinburne. They are filled with such splendid phrases as

“ Whose blush the moon beauteously mars,
And stains the timorous light of stars;”

with such stanzas as

“ Not in the Evening’s eyes
When they red with weeping are
For the sun that dies,
Sits sorrow with a face so fair.”¹

The final apostrophe to “the seraphical Saint Theresa” in the poem upon her book and picture is unequalled in all the range of the religious lyric.

Crashaw’s secular verse lacks the enthusiasm of his hymns, yet it has their music and color. His two most graceful love lyrics are a translation from the Italian, “To thy lover, dear discover,” and his well-known *Wishes to his supposed Mistress*, a poem which shows his defects as well as his virtues. He was too versatile—an engraver, musician, and poet—and he expressed himself too readily. Language was a facile instrument; metrical expression offered no difficulties; and his style, easy and brilliant, is often too diffuse. With few ideas to express, he prolongs his poems through several pages; the thought that the Magdalene is weeping suffices for thirty-three stanzas, some of the greatest beauty, others pure bathos. He needed the restraint of Jonson; his most sustained poems are adaptations (one can hardly call them translations), such as his *Music’s Duel*, taken from the Latin of Strada—a most successful attempt to express one art in terms of another. His *Wishes*, full of that Platonism that inspired Spenser,

¹ *Crashaw*, p. 260.

"Till that divine
Idea, take a shrine
Of crystal flesh, through which to shine;"

is greatly improved by the excisions made by Palgrave.

It is interesting to observe the effect of Crashaw's writings on other poets. Milton, his contemporary, did not disdain to borrow from him; Pope and Coleridge, the extremes of opposing schools, acknowledge their indebtedness to him. Pope sends to his friend, Henry Cromwell, a copy of Crashaw and states that he has read his poetry several times.¹ He selects as very remarkable lines from Crashaw, balanced couplets from *Music's Duel*, almost the only verses that approach his own style, for the poem is marked by its free handling of the heroic metre. He was untouched by Crashaw's spirit and merely lifted phrases.² On the other hand, Coleridge complains of Crashaw's lack of form and sweetness, but goes so far as to assert that "where he does combine richness of thought and diction, nothing can excel." He continues: "his lines on St. Theresa are the finest. . . . These verses were ever present to my mind whilst writing the second part of *Christabel*; if, indeed, by some subtle process of the mind, they did not suggest the first thought of the whole poem."³ The influence here asserted is such a subtle one that without Coleridge's statement, it would not be suspected, yet it must be remembered as no small part of Crashaw's accomplishment, that he inspired one of the finest achievements of the romantic school.

It is difficult to assign to Crashaw his position in our lyric poetry because of his unevenness. When, in his own words, he is

¹ Elwin and Courthope, *The Works of Alexander Pope*, vol. VI, London, 1871, pp. 109, 116.

² For example, "Obedient slumbers that can wake and weep," in *Eloisa to Abelard*.

³ J. W. Mackail, *Coleridge's Literary Criticism*, London, 1908, p. 149.

“Dressed in the glorious madness of a Muse
Whose feet can walk the milky way and choose
Her starry crown,”¹

he seems more truly inspired than any of his contemporaries, always excepting Milton. In a degree, Herrick includes Carew; Herbert and Vaughan stand near each other; the sons of Ben, the followers of Donne have much in common; but Crashaw, a romanticist born out of due time, stands absolutely alone.

The numerous editions of Herbert's *Temple* are not the only proof of its popularity. More important, as an indication of its effect on the lyric, are the imitations it inspired. “After him followed divers, Sed non passibus æquis; they had more of fashion than force,” writes Vaughan of Herbert,² and we see this imitation, sometimes throughout a whole book, as in Harvey's *Synagogue* (1640), at other times in single poems, as in *Meditation* or *The Mercy Seat* in Thomas Beedome's *Poems Divine and Human* (1641). The most important follower of Herbert (he was more than a follower, for in many respects he surpassed him) was Henry Vaughan (1621-1695) the Silurist, as he calls himself, from Siluria, the Roman name for his birthplace, South Wales. After his student days at Jesus College, Oxford, and at London, he passed his life in Wales as a country doctor, unknown and unmentioned by the Restoration writers.

Unlike Herbert, Vaughan published two collections of secular verse, *Poems* (1647) and *Olor Iscanus* (1651). His love poetry is very tame indeed; his verses to Amoret are smoothly written but lifeless, and it is amusing to hear Vaughan, in his religious lyrics, speaking regretfully of his “Idle Verse.”

¹ Crashaw, p. 146.

² E. K. Chambers, *The Poems of Henry Vaughan, Silurist, Muses' Library*, London, 1896, vol. I, p. 7.

“ Go, go, quaint follies, sugared sin,
 Shadow no more my door;
 I will no longer cobwebs spin;
 I’m too much on the score.

* * * * *

“ Blind, desperate fits, that study how
 To dress and trim our shame;
 That gild rank poison, and allow
 Vice in a fairer name;

“ The purls of youthful blood and bowls,
 Lust in the robes of Love;
 The idle talk of feverish souls
 Sick with a scarf or glove.”¹

There is a slight possibility that the last stanza may refer to Suckling’s poetry; in any case, he would have smiled at the mild verses written in what Vaughan called his “warmer days.” It is believed that Vaughan fought in the Royal army, but at heart he is a Puritan; in *The World*, the doting lover is placed with the perjured statesman and the downright epicure, fools that

“ prefer dark night
 Before true light!”²

As a writer of love lyrics, Vaughan does not deserve remembrance.

His genius found adequate expression in his *Silex Scintillans* (Part I, 1650; Part II, 1652). Here are some one hundred and thirty religious lyrics and didactic poems; fifty of them show Herbert’s influence, at times imitating line for line a given poem from the *Temple*, at other times reflecting Herbert’s spirit, or catching up a phrase here and there. As an illustration of this, Vaughan’s *Son-Days* imitates two poems

¹ P. 113.

² P. 150.

of the *Temple* which we have cited, *Prayer*, and *Sunday*; a glance at a single stanza will show that the decisive event in Vaughan's poetic development was his receiving a copy of Herbert's poems. Sundays are

“ The pulleys unto headlong man; Time's bower;
 The narrow way;
Transplanted Paradise; God's walking hour,
 The cool o' th' day!
The creature's jubilee; God's parle with dust;
 Heaven here; man on those hills of myrrh and flowers;
Angels descending; the returns of trust;
 A gleam of glory after six days showers!”¹

As a rule Vaughan does not improve on Herbert in his poems deliberately modelled on definite lyrics in the *Temple*; his *Easter Day* lacks the force of Herbert's *Dawning*; his *Pursuit* the vividness and deep feeling of the *Pulley*; his *Ornament* the beauty of expression and the personal touch that makes Herbert's *Quip* one of his most notable poems. Herbert's enduring effect on Vaughan was gained not by furnishing him definite models for his verse but by stirring his spiritual emotions, by showing him what feelings the religious lyric could express. Vaughan differed from Herbert in temperament; he is equally devout, but more calm, more satisfied with the world. There is pathos in Vaughan, but not the pathos of indecision and unrest. Nature too often brought to Herbert a message of reproach; the trees bore their fruit and sheltered the birds in their branches, but his own life seemed empty. Vaughan found the world beautiful to contemplate; he believed that nature was full of consolation and hope. Marvell's *Garden* had no religious significance for him; to Vaughan the bird driven in his window by the storm tells of the life of the spirit. He finds a flower fresh

¹ P. 114.

and green beneath the snow; in thoroughly characteristic lines he seeks its message:

“ Yet I, whose search loved not to peep and peer
I’ th’ face of things,
Thought with myself, there might be other springs
Besides this here.”

As Tennyson would question the flower in the crannied wall,
so to the plant

“ Many a question intricate and rare
Did I there strow;”¹

and as he sees the flower sleeping in the cold of winter, he realizes that the dead rest in peace. It must not be thought that Vaughan pushes this spiritual interpretation of nature to excess; he is not always pointing a moral; he can view nature with the eyes of an artist:

“ I see a rose
Bud in the bright East, and disclose
The pilgrim sun.”²

His poems are filled with little descriptive touches that show a man who lived out of doors, who loved the earth and the sky. We are struck more frequently by the observation shown in his verses than by their technique; he is, for example, one of the first English poets to write often of clouds.

Vaughan was more than an observer; he possessed imaginative insight and if on the whole he does not appear as thoughtful as Herbert, he often strikes deeper. A good instance of this are the famous opening lines of *The World*, in which he pictures eternity as “a great ring of pure and endless light, All calm as it was bright.” Herbert has noth-

¹ Pp. 171, 172.

² P. 33.

ing to compare with Vaughan's *Retreat*, a panegyric on childhood that is the poetic converse to Browning's *Rabbi Ben Ezra*. Former poets had written in praise of beautiful children; it was reserved for Vaughan to discern the spiritual beauty of childhood:

" When on some gilded cloud, or flower,
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity."

It is the age of innocence that he both praises and mourns; he would call back that time when he felt

" through all this fleshly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness."¹

Vaughan appears more modern than Herbert, especially in "They are all gone into the world of light," one of the most beautiful of all English elegies. It contains Vaughan's finest traits; exquisite are the nature descriptions which the lyric was soon to lose for over a century:

" It glows and glitters in my cloudy breast,
Like stars upon some gloomy grove,
Or those faint beams in which this hill is dress'd
After the sun's remove."

For a perfect comparison few stanzas can equal:

" He that hath found some fledged bird's nest, may know
At first sight, if the bird be flown;
But what fair well or grove he sings in now,
That is to him unknown."

Except for the metre, it might well be found in *In Memoriam*. How utterly removed is such writing from the formal similes with which the lyric poets of the coming generation con-

¹ P. 59.

tented themselves. For intense but restrained feeling perfectly expressed this poem has rarely been surpassed. What the Italian sonneteers tried in vain to do in their apostrophes to death, Vaughan has accomplished in a single quatrain:

“ Dear, beauteous Death! the jewel of the just,
Shining nowhere, but in the dark;
What mysteries do lie beyond thy dust,
Could men outlook that mark!”¹

Vaughan was not always such an artist; many of his poems are marred by infelicitous passages, but this does not account for Herbert's greater popularity. The explanation lies in the fact that the moods of the *Temple* are nearer everyday experience than those of Vaughan, who loved “strange thoughts” that

“ transcend our wonted themes
And into glory peep.”

We remembered the influence of Crashaw upon *Christabel*; we must not forget the closer connection between Vaughan's *Retreat* and Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*. To compare these two poems differing widely in their *genres* would be absurd; if we must make a choice we would not lose the great ode, yet in its simpler metre, its quieter manner, its quainter diction, the *Retreat* seems nearer to that age of innocence which both poets celebrate.

Herbert, Crashaw, and Vaughan, though the chief, were by no means the only writers of religious lyrics in this age we are considering. William Habington (1605-1654) published in 1634 *Castara*, a collection of secular and religious verse that went through three editions before the poet's

¹ P. 182.

death. A country gentleman writing poetry for his amusement, Habington has little sentiment or imagination in his love lyrics though he assures us that he "feels a distracted rage" and that

"All those tortures, poets (by their wine
Made judges) laid on Tantalus, are mine."

His religious lyrics show more emotion:

"Place me alone in some frail boat,
'Mid th' horrors of an angry sea,
Where I, while time shall move, may float
Despairing either land or day!

"Or under earth my youth confine
To th' night and silence of a cell;
Where scorpions may my limbs entwine.
O God! so thou forgive me hell."¹

This is quite different in its intensity of feeling from *To Cupid, Upon a dimple in Castara's Cheek*. Although a Catholic, he has little in common with Crashaw; *Nox Nocti Indicant Scientiam*, his best lyric, has in certain of its stanzas a dignity of thought and expression that approach the vigor of Dryden.

More famous than Habington, "in wonderful veneration among the vulgar," was Francis Quarles (1592-1644), "the sometime darling of our plebeian judgment," as Wood calls him. He was unfortunately a most energetic writer (his widow informs us that he began his composing at three in the morning!) and his verse, plebeian in tone, lacking charm and distinction, is depressing reading. The lyrical element in his work is small; he is a didactic writer, yet his strong

¹ E. Arber, *Castara*, in *English Reprints*, London, 1870, pp. 19, 133.

religious feeling finds expression at times in a *Gottesminne* that has much of Crashaw's spirit. Gosse notices that some of these religious lyrics, slightly altered, were adapted to baser uses and published with Rochester's and Dorset's erotic verse, yet such poems are few in number. He has left hardly a single lyric that is sustained throughout. A song against the Puritans in his *Shepherd's Oracle*, published posthumously, points to Butler's satire on the Roundheads:

" Know then, my brethren, heaven is clear,
And all the clouds are gone;
The righteous now shall flourish and
Good days are coming on;

" Come then, my brethren, and be glad,
And eke rejoice with me:
Lawn sleeves and rochets shall go down,
And, heȝ! then up go we."¹

but this is neither better nor worse than many anonymous songs of the war. The fourteenth poem of the *Hieroglyphics* shows Quarles at his best. It is an elegy, its long, slow metre corresponding well with its gloomy thought:

" The day grows old, the low-pitched lamp hath made
Now less than treble shade,"

while in such verses as

" And now the cold autumnal dews are seen
To cobweb every green;
And by the low-shorn rowins doth appear
The fast-declining year,"²

¹ A. B. Grosart, *Complete Works in Prose and Verse of Francis Quarles*, Edinburgh, 1870, vol. III, p. 235.

² P. 196.

we have really effective description of nature. Such occasional passages are all that will save Quarles from total neglect.

V

We have reserved for the closing pages of our chapter the greatest genius of this age, John Milton (1608-1674), and with him we may mention Sir Henry Wotton (1568-1639). Among the minor poets of the day, Wotton holds an honorable place. Finely educated at Oxford, then for eight years a student in France, Germany, Spain, and Italy, he became the most cultured man of his generation and fittingly ended his career as Provost of Eton. He was an accomplished critic of painting and architecture and his long residence abroad as ambassador at Venice gave him ample opportunity to develop his artistic tastes. His own poetry was dignified and graceful, but like many critics, he lacked creative force. His little pastoral, admired by Walton, "As on a bank I sat reclined," anticipates Milton's *L'Allegro*; his "How happy is he born and taught," has a moral earnestness expressed eloquently; his best lyric, "Ye meaner beauties of the night," written for the unhappy Elizabeth of Bohemia, has much of the polish and of the gallantry of Carew.

Shortly before leaving on his Italian journey, Milton sent to Wotton a copy of *Comus*. The letter of thanks which he received for it must have thrilled him with pride and sent him on his way with a renewed confidence in his powers. While Wotton commends the "tragical part" of the masque, he prefers the lyrical passages; he is ravished "with a certain Doric delicacy in your songs and odes, whereunto I must plainly confess to have seen yet nothing parallel in our language: Ipsa mollities." Never was there a juster criticism; the lyric note that Milton struck had not been heard.

The first of Milton's lyrical achievements, the *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, showed this same originality and revealed, as did Pope's earliest compositions, the essential marks of the poet's genius. Written when he was twenty-one, an undergraduate at Cambridge, it is not surprising that the ode, for all its greatness, is an uneven performance. That Milton was attracted by the conceits of the day is shown in several fantastic touches: we could well spare the penultimate stanza with its description of the sun in bed, drawing the clouds as curtains and pillowing "his chin upon an orient wave"; but whereas the metaphysical poets made their conceits prominent, in this hymn they are merely mistaken touches of ornamentation. Milton writes, then, not in the style of the day but in his own manner.

We see in the ode that reticence which always marked Milton's poetic utterances; even in the most personal sonnets we feel a certain reserve. He chooses a religious theme and writes of it objectively at the very time when George Herbert was finding in the religious lyric the most vital medium of personal expression. We must not push this point too far; obviously it would have been inartistic for the poet to intrude himself in such a hymn, but there was legitimate opportunity for the personal note, if but in a phrase here and there. Milton eventually turned from the lyric because of the aloofness of his nature; the reticence he maintains, his suppression of personal emotion, is fatal to the song impulse. Critics constantly attribute the veiled personal utterance in *Paradise Lost*, Milton's scorn for the sons of Belial, his contempt for the pomp of court processions and "grooms besmeared with gold" to his precarious position in Restoration London. As a matter of fact, Milton would have written with the same reserve had Cromwell been governing England. In his prose he tells of himself and his ambitions fearlessly; in his verse, excepting a few sonnets, he soars far above the earth.

If the lyric does not gain with Milton a fuller revelation of personality, it finds in this ode a new music. Though Milton admired Spenser, he has not sought to reproduce his lusciousness of phrase; the richness of his melody has disappeared and in its place we find a vigor of phrase and a haunting music. "Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song," is a typical strain of the *Prothalamion*. "The trumpet spake not to the armed throng," represents the movement of Milton's ode. Yet Milton felt the fascination of strange words and sounds; we find here that magic use of unfamiliar names which he employs so often in his epic:

"Peor and Baälim
Forsake their temples dim,"

or

"Nor is Osiris seen
In Memphian grove or green."

That a new master had taken up the lyre is felt at once in such a superb stanza as

"The lonely mountains o'er,
And the resounding shore,
A voice of weeping heard and loud lament;
From haunted spring, and dale
Edgèd with poplar pale,
The parting Genius is with sighing sent;
With flower-inwoven tresses torn
The Nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn."

These lines are among the imperishable trophies of the English lyric.

The thought of the ode is indicative of the change that had come over English song. There is little description for its own sake; where the Elizabethans would have lavished detail, Milton employs economy of phrase. One stanza suffices for the description of the mother and child:

“ But see! the Virgin blest
Hath laid her babe to rest,
Time is our tedious song should here have ending:
Heaven’s youngest-teemèd star
Hath fixed her polished car,
Her sleeping Lord with handmaid lamp attending;
And all about the courtly stable
Bright-harnessed angels sit in order serviceable.”

Instead of elaborating one or two incidents or describing clearly defined events, the poet’s thoughts wander through eternity; he muses on the destruction of the false gods or on the cessation of the oracles. The range of thought and imagination in this ode is as remarkable as its music. Here Milton points to the lyric of the next generation. The deepening of the content of song, the significant work of the poets of Milton’s age, is as extraordinary as the artistic changes wrought by the Elizabethans.

At Cambridge Milton had practiced what he called the “Petrarchian stanza.” His sonnet to the nightingale, which stands alone among his English lyrics in its suggestion of romance, is proof that before he left for the continent, he had acquired the grace of expression that characterized the successors of Petrarch. Love complaints, the usual theme of sonnet collections, he disdained, but he imitated the Italian use of the sonnet for the expression of friendship and praise. Always a law unto himself, Milton observes the Italian rhyme scheme, but not the sharp separation of the octave and sestet. We have said that Shakespeare’s sonnets find an echo in the sonnets of Keats; Milton’s stand alone. The sonnets on his blindness have such nobility and dignity of expression, such restraint in their pathos, that the laments of our modern romanticists, when compared with them, read like the complaints of querulous children. The greatest of all his sonnets, “Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints,” is the most forceful expression of a burning anger in all our

sonnet literature. That fourteen lines could express so perfectly and so adequately such intense feeling is one of the miracles of verse.

The greatest lyrical achievement of Milton is *Lycidas*. Its sole detractor is Dr. Johnson, who objected to the metrical scheme of the poem and above all, to its pastoral setting. *Lycidas*, he argued, is not the expression of real but feigned sorrow, "for passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions. Where there is leisure for fiction, there is little grief."¹ Many a modern reader has felt, though to a lesser degree, the contrast between the clear, outspoken frankness of our modern elegies and Milton's allegorical presentation of his sense of loss. The death of King seems forgotten in Milton's attack on the church or in his search for the right adjective to picture the primrose or the violet.

It must be remembered that the pastoral had been consecrated to complaints and elegies; so far from being an artificial means of expression, for a poet versed in the classics and in Italian literature, it was the most natural one. Certainly Milton turned to it instinctively. There can be no doubt of the sincerity of his grief at the death of his best friend, Diodati, a man who had stood much nearer to him than did King. To mourn him, Milton wrote not only a pastoral, but a Latin pastoral in which occur the same phrases which Dr. Johnson considered meaningless in *Lycidas*—flocks, fields, "copses, flowers, heathen divinities." In adopting this form, Milton has added to traits common to all Italian and English pastoral elegies, elements that seem strangely at variance. No one but the greatest artist could have made of such material a perfect whole. Here is Christian and Pagan thought; idyllic description and the fierce denunciation of the reformer; classic imagery and the very essence of the shudder and mystery of romance in the thought of the shipwrecked friend washed far away

¹ *Life of Milton*.

“beyond the stormy Hebrides,
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world.”

Not only is *Lycidas* supreme in English pastoral elegy, but what can surpass it in other literatures?

The music of the poem is as remarkable as its beauty of expression. Here, as later in *Paradise Lost*, Milton employs verse paragraphs, each one different in its movement, yet all blending perfectly, as the various instruments in an orchestra make up one great volume of sound. We marvel not so much at the rhythm of individual verses, or at the music of certain phrases, but rather at the harmony of the whole elegy. Spenser's odes have no such strength of sound; even the most aspiring passages of his hymns lack the force of this measured cadence. The Elizabethan lyric is written for the tabor, the lute, the virginals; here we listen to the tones of an organ. The art of the poem is as great as the inspiration; we are carried on and on by the sweep of the verse until the elegy reads as though it had been struck off in the white heat of the poet's emotion, yet Milton's manuscript shows how patiently he revised word and phrase. Familiarity with *Lycidas* but deepens admiration; its music haunts the ear, its phrases the memory. It is the most truly inspired lyric that England had yet produced.

If, at the close of this chapter, we attempt to gather up in a few sentences the chief distinctions between the Elizabethan lyric and Jacobean and Caroline song, we perceive that the later lyric is less spontaneous in its expression and that it has less of the light-hearted attitude towards life. Men are no longer content to paraphrase Petrarch; they have begun to peer in the face of things, to analyze their feelings, to question their thoughts. Technically, the later lyric shows more reserve. With exuberance of fancy has gone the freer metrical movement of song; the lyric measures

are more restrained; the art is more evident. The old idealism is passing away, yet its light has not wholly vanished. If we miss the Elizabethan spirit, we must remember that in compensation, song has deepened its message; it has come closer to the hearts and minds of men. If there is less brilliancy of phrase in the Caroline lyric, there is in the love poetry a charm and a grace, an unmistakable touch that lends distinction and that brings us back to these songs again and again.

CHAPTER SIX

THE LYRIC FROM THE RESTORATION TO THE DEATH OF POPE

I

The Restoration marks a new epoch in the lyric as well as in the drama. The proof of this statement is to be found in the neglect which overtook the poets we have just considered. "Theirs was the giant race before the flood," wrote Dryden, and the change in taste was indeed a deluge that spared the dramatic writings of Shakespeare, Jonson, and Fletcher, but entirely submerged the less pretentious works of their contemporaries. Donne, no longer a force, was vaguely remembered as a wit; Herbert, adopted by the church, was read more as a preacher than as a poet; the other lyrists—Love-lace, Herrick, Crashaw, we need not name them all—were quite forgotten:

" But for the wits of either Charles's days,
The mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease;
Sprat, Carew, Sedley, and a hundred more,
(Like twinkling stars the miscellanies o'er)
One simile, that solitary shines
In the dry desert of a thousand lines,
Or lengthened thought that gleams through many a page,
Has sanctified whole poems for an age."¹

So wrote Pope three quarters of a century after these writers flourished. Of the poets who lived previous to the Restoration, he mentions only Carew; the rather ambiguous "hundred more" suggests that he did not know even the names of

¹ *The First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace*, ll. 107-114.

Carew's contemporaries.¹ That he had not studied them is perfectly evident, for he complains of the absence of brilliant similes and striking thought in Caroline verse. The average reader would have even less knowledge of these lyrists, for Pope was a close student of poetry.

It is customary to explain the difference that exists between Elizabethan and Jacobean verse on the one hand and Restoration and Queen Anne verse on the other, by a short and convenient phrase—French influence. Like many other formulæ, it offers no real solution of the question; when we seek for such borrowings from the French as we found in Elizabethan poetry, we discover nothing. Pope indeed drew from Boileau, but the spirit of English verse had been transformed before Pope wrote his satires. Had France possessed no literature, English poetry would have undergone precisely the same change we find in it.

The descent from the heights of Elizabethan song to the plains and even the marshes of the Restoration lyric is such a deep one that it is natural to look for some compelling influence from without rather than to the perfectly comprehensible desire of a new generation for new themes and a new style. The English novel swings from romance to realism, from realism to romance, not because novelists are imitating Continental writers, but because each generation and even each decade has its own conception of life which it must express. The sonnets of Petrarch, Platonism, Elizabethan chivalry, were exhausted sources of lyric inspiration; England had outgrown or forgotten them and the age desired to see itself in its writings. Moreover the style of the lyric was plainly developing towards that of the Restoration and pseudo-classic schools. Jonson, in his songs, laid the chief emphasis upon form and finish and the minor writers from

¹ Pope had his sneer at Quarles and we have seen that he read Crashaw carefully. Writing to Cromwell, he describes Crashaw as though he were unknown.

1625 to 1650 show an increasing fondness for the couplet and a readiness to abandon the older lyric measures. In 1636 appeared *Fasciculus Florum or a Nosegay of Flowers, translated out of the Gardens of several poets and other authors*. It is significant that nearly every one of the eight hundred and fifty-three selections are taken not from the Italian or French but from the Latin, and that with but few exceptions, the couplet is the medium of translation. The substance of the lyric was changing also. There are songs of Lovelace and Suckling that would pass undetected in the poems of Sedley and Rochester, and we find an even clearer prophecy of the Restoration lyric in the work of Edmund Waller (1606-1687).

His earliest poem describes the escape of Charles I (then Prince of Wales) from being swept out to sea.¹ Although the verses were revised before their publication in 1645, they were written in 1623 when this event occurred. If we examine the poem carefully we perceive that when Waller was but seventeen his style was so formed that it shows no real development in all his later work; as Dr. Johnson observed, "his versification was, in his first essay, such as it appears in his last performance." Though he proved weak and cowardly in the struggle between the King and Parliament, in his verse he showed a certain boldness of innovation. He cared little for his contemporaries; he told Aubrey that he had never met Ben Jonson and certainly he shows no marks of Donne's wit. Turning aside from the literary fashions of the day, he chose for himself a measured style quite different from Jonson's well-calculated stanzas. "When he was a brisk young spark," writes Aubrey, "and first studied poetry, 'Me thought,' said he, 'I never saw a good copy of English verses; they want smoothness; then I began to

¹ G. T. Drury, *Poems of Edmund Waller, Muses' Library*, London, 1893, p. 1.

essay.’”¹ He revolted, if such a weak nature can be said to revolt, against all irregularity of style. Taking Fairfax as his model, he found in the couplets of his translation of Tasso the desired metre. In this verse form he wrote the greater part of his poetry, yet he is fond of octosyllabics and chose for the song in which he really lives—“Go, lovely rose”—an irregular stanza.

His first poem, then, showed his one good quality—a smooth style. He did not bring the couplet to perfection. Dryden gave it energy and strength; Pope, epigrammatic point and brilliancy; but Waller made it as popular a verse form as the sonnet had been. So great was his fame that by his rejection of the lyric measures of the Elizabethans and by his outspoken preference for definite rules in place of freedom in verse composition, he fettered the spirit of song.

“Above our neighbors our conceptions are;
But faultless writing is the effect of care.
Our lines reformed, and not composed in haste,
Polished like marble, would like marble last.”²

There is no lyric note in such writing. Patient workmanship was to take the place of the poetic impulse; the lines of a song were no more to rise and fall with the thought, but were to be laid carefully one upon another.

Not only did Waller change the music of the lyric; he modified its content. In the hands of Marlowe, the couplet had expressed the very essence of romantic beauty and passion. Nearer Waller’s own day, Browne had used the heroic measure in his *Britannia’s Pastorals* to describe nature. Waller rejected all deeper emotions, and not content with “elegance of diction,” sought for “propriety of thought.” In his poem on the Earl of Roscommon’s translation of Horace, he gives his literary creed:

¹ Introduction, p. LXX.

² P. 224.

“ Horace will our superfluous branches prune,
Give us new rules, and set our harps in tune;
Direct us how to back the winged horse,
Favour his flight, and moderate his force.
Though poets may of inspiration boast,
Their rage. ill governed, in the clouds is lost.”¹

Here we have the critical, self-conscious attitude towards poetry and it is not surprising that we find few lyrics in an age that prized correctness above emotion and high imagination. Waller's diction shows the limiting hand of conventionality. Shakespeare had spoken of the poet's "rage"; with Waller this becomes a stereotyped word and even the bee, flying from flower to flower, "rages." We read of "nymphs," of "gilded scenes," of sounds that "invade the ear," and we seem to hear Pope. Waller never forgets himself; he is never carried away by a burst of feeling; and his self-restraint and moderation debase his poetry to weak society verse.

Waller wrote a number of love lyrics. The name most closely connected with his is that of Sacharissa, or in plain English, Dorothy Sidney, eldest daughter of the Earl of Leicester. Though Waller tells us that her "beam of beauty" scorches like the raging sun, it did not inspire even a gentle glow in the poet's verses. The most hasty reader must notice the absence of romance and feeling in these once famous lyrics. If, as Gosse assumes, *To a Girdle* and "Go, lovely rose," were addressed to Sacharissa, certainly his "passion" produced his two finest songs, but there is nothing to support this theory. To use Waller's own phrase, he "pursued the nymph in vain," and on her marriage wrote very calmly of his lost mistress. We agree with his earliest biographer that "he was not of such a complexion as to become a martyr to his passions."

¹ P. 214.

We have said that in his lyrics he gives us society verse, but in this *genre* he can not take a high position. His trifling has not the charm of Herrick's; he has not caught the careless tone of Suckling; he lacks Prior's wit. The one admirable quality he possessed was a mild eloquence, seen at its best in his masterpiece.

“ Then die! that she
The common fate of all things rare
May read in thee;
How small a part of time they share
That are so wondrous sweet and fair!”¹

Here is no pathos, no deep melancholy, but a charming and graceful rendering of an old theme. His care and polish are not too evident and the lyric is free from his formal similes and his classic deities. Nowhere is he more musical and in abandoning his poetic theories he has written one of the loveliest of English songs.

Though Waller's lyrics hardly seem adapted for music, Henry Lawes composed melodies for them. One of them is quoted with admiration in Walton's *Complete Angler*:

“ While I listen to thy voice,
Chloris! I feel my life decay;
That powerful noise
Calls my flitting soul away.
Oh! suppress that magic sound,
Which destroys without a wound.”²

Here and there we meet with a fine phrase. *Love's Farewell* commences in a deeper tone than usual:

“ Treading the path to nobler ends,
A long farewell to love I gave,
Resolved my country, and my friends,
All that remained of me should have.

¹ P. 128.

² P. 127.

" And this resolve no mortal dame,
None but those eyes could have o'erthrown,
The nymph I dare not, need not name,
So high, so like herself alone."

The last line has the true ring, but Waller immediately falls back on the couplet, introduces a conventional simile beginning

" Thus the tall oak, which now aspires
Above the fear of private fires,"¹

and the song is ruined.

If we are astonished at the obscurity that covered Herick's poems, we are more amazed at the fame Waller enjoyed for nearly a century. His name constantly recurs in the writings of the Restoration and of the Queen Anne age, and is invariably mentioned with respect.² "Spenser's verses are so numerous, so various, and so harmonious that only Virgil has surpassed him among the Romans; and only Mr. Waller among the English,"³ writes Dryden, and the statement shows how completely the fine sense of rhythm and of melody had been lost. Speaking of rhyme, Dryden informs us that "the excellence and dignity of it were never fully known until Mr. Waller taught it; he first made writing easily an art."⁴ This praise is constantly repeated by the writers who succeeded Dryden. "Nor yet shall Waller yield to fame," wrote Pope, and without a doubt he was considered the greatest lyric poet that England had produced. "The admired Mr. Waller," the "first refiner of our English tongue," is quite forgotten to-day; only three or four of his lyrics are remembered; and the adulation he received

¹ P. 93.

² The flattering eulogy on Waller in the poems of Robert Hill, 1775, p. 52, shows how persistently the tradition continued.

³ *Essay on Satire*.

⁴ Dedication to *The Rival Ladies*.

merely shows how far the desire to be correct could pervert the taste.

Another poet, once held in the highest esteem, shares Waller's fate. Abraham Cowley (1618-1667) seemed destined for great achievements. His *Poetical Blossoms*, published when he was about fifteen, showed something more than mere precocity. He produced plays when a student at Westminster school and at Cambridge; his *Mistress*, brought out in 1647, was considered the most important series of love poems of that period. His *Odes*, 1656, introduced into English verse the "high Pindaric style"—his chief distinction—and the wide applause these inflated, rhetorical verses received is best shown in Sprat's ode on Cowley, one of the curiosities of poetic eulogy.

In his earliest poem Cowley writes:

"From too much poetry that shines
With gold in nothing but its lines,
Free, O you powers, my breast."¹

and in all his work he endeavored to show his wit. In this respect, as Dr. Johnson pointed out, he is a follower of Donne, but he lacks absolutely his imagination and emotion. The *Mistress* is hard reading; it has little feeling and its ingenuity of thought is not great enough to hold the flagging interest.

"But do not touch my heart, and so be gone;
Strike deep thy burning arrows in:
Lukewarmness I account a sin,
As great in love, as in religion."²

¹ A. R. Waller, *Essays and Plays of Abraham Cowley*, Cambridge, 1906, p. 49.

² A. R. Waller, *The Poems of Abraham Cowley*, Cambridge, 1905, p. 66.

he tells us. Judged by this standard, Cowley is the chief of sinners. One stanza will show this; its artificiality is unfortunately typical not only of the *Mistress* but of many a Restoration lyric:

“ I came, I saw, and was undone;
 Lightning did through my bones and marrow run;
 A pointed pain pierced deep my heart;
A swift, cold trembling seized on every part;
 My head turned round, nor could it bear
 The poison that was entered there.”

The next stanza descends to the formal simile:

“ So a destroying angel’s breath
Blows in the plague, and with it hasty death.”¹

Such writing is a mere academic exercise. Many of the Elizabethan songs have very little feeling, but there is ample compensation in their charm of metre and grace of diction. We do not find these saving qualities in Cowley’s poems; rarely he has something of the Elizabethan spirit in such a passage as:

“ Love in her sunny eyes does basking play;
Love walks the pleasant mazes of her hair;
Love does on both her lips for ever stray;
And sows and reaps a thousand kisses there.
In all her outward parts Love’s always seen;
 But, oh, he never went within.”²

but the rest of the poem falls far below this. He writes on the subjects that every sonneteer employed—sleep, absence, parting, beauty unadorned—yet there is not a single sonnet in all these poems. We hardly recognize the familiar themes, for, disguised in Cowley’s rhetoric, they seem translated into a new language.

¹ P. 67.

² P. 76.

The Mistress, though admired, did not set the fashion for the Restoration love lyric; Rochester, Sedley, Dorset, and their contemporaries preferred a more direct and a less ingenious manner than Cowley employed. It was his *Odes* that introduced a new poetic style. There is a long list of writers, from his day to our own, who have paid homage to Cowley by their use of his "Pindaric stanzas." When we consider the veneration in which the classics were held, it is surprising that no English poet had hitherto adopted Pindar's method; Jonson's ode to the memory of Cary and Morison is his solitary experiment in this *genre*. A full century before Cowley's work appeared, Ronsard had won the title of "le Pindare françois" by writing a series of odes imitating the Greek poet's language and thought much more closely than Cowley ever attempted to do. The Elizabethans, we remember, translated Ronsard's sonnets; they were not attracted by his Pindaric flights.

In his prefaces, Cowley has discussed his odes. He tells us that in two of his versions of Pindar he took, omitted, and added what he pleased. He aimed to show the reader not what Pindar said but his manner of speaking; Pindar's style, "though it be the noblest and highest kind of writing in verse," had not yet been introduced into English literature. He fears these Pindaric odes will not be understood even by readers well versed in poetry because of the sudden and long digressions and their bold and unusual figures. "The numbers are various and irregular, and sometimes seem harsh and uncouth, if the just measures and cadences be not observed in the pronunciation." The music of these poems lies wholly at the mercy of the reader.¹ So much for his poetic theory; his practice is well shown in a single stanza from his *Ode upon Liberty*, in which he speaks once more of his Pindaric style:

¹ Pp. 156, 11.

" If Life should a well-ordered poem be,
 (In which he only hits the white
 Who joins true profit with the best delight)
 The more heroic strain let others take,
 Mine the Pindaric way I'll make,
 The matter shall be grave, the numbers loose and free.
 It shall not keep one settled pace of time,
 In the same tune it shall not always chime,
 Nor shall each day just to his neighbour rhyme.
 A thousand liberties it shall dispense,
 And yet shall manage all without offence."¹

In other words, to write on some abstract theme, using an irregular verse form, was to catch the very spirit of Pindar.

As a matter of fact, the odes of Pindar have a regular structure—"a system of stanzas recurring in the same order till the end of the poem, and consisting of two stanzas of identical form, the strophe and antistrophe, followed by a third, the epode, entirely differing from the two others."² Cowley never perceived this (though Jonson had understood it) and it was left to Congreve to point out that Cowley never followed Pindar, even afar off.³ To Cowley's immediate contemporaries, his irregularity of metre implied imagination and even sublimity. The poet had only to group together a certain number of long and short verses and his thought assumed an unmistakable majesty. If Waller's couplets on the escape of Prince Charles had been transformed to irregular stanzas and not a syllable of their substance altered, by some mysterious process the verse would have been lifted to the realms of the imagination. We understand to-day that no device of metre can atone for a lack of inspiration. The question is not whether odes are regular or irregular, but whether there is any life in them. In his

¹ *Essays and Plays*, p. 391.

² J. Schipper, *A History of English Versification*, Oxford, 1910, p. 366. Cf. Introductory Essay to B. L. Gildersleeve's *Pindar*, N. Y., 1885.

³ *Discourse on the Pindaric Ode*.

Progress of Poesy, Gray follows exactly the regular structure of the Greek ode, but it is doubtful whether the reader perceives this; what he does notice is the imagination and the thought. Cowley has cleverness and ingenuity of thought rather than imagination and a gentle melancholy rather than deep emotion; accordingly he was temperamentally unfitted for this most difficult of all lyric types. At the close of his *Ode on the Resurrection* it is curious to hear him beg his Muse to "allay thy vigorous heat," to

" Hold thy Pindarique Pegasus closely in,
Which does to rage begin,"¹

for in most of the verses, Pegasus has certainly ambled.

There is something to be said on the other side, for Cowley possessed one quality—though hardly a lyric one—which we must not overlook. His best odes have an intellectual element, a reasoning in verse, which is not without attraction and which goes far to explain his popularity with his contemporaries and why Milton valued him with Spenser and Shakespeare. To see this we have merely to turn to the *Ode to the Royal Society* or to the better *Hymn to Light*. Here with a certain felicity of phrase at times approaching the language of imagination, he traces light from the rose to the jewel, from the rainbow to the firefly,

" Nor amidst all these triumphs dost thou scorn
The humble glow-worms to adorn,
And with those living spangles gild
(O greatness without pride!) the bushes of the field."²

Cowley is most attractive in his less formal writing. His *Anacreontics* are light and graceful and the ode at the close of his essay on gardens has many charming lines. He will

¹ *Poems*, p. 182.

² P. 445.

be remembered chiefly by two elegies, on Richard Crashaw and on William Hervey, a college friend. In the days of religious bigotry and persecution he is not afraid to praise his brother poet, a Catholic convert. In lines full of that emotion which the odes lacked, he exalts the purity of his life and the intensely spiritual quality of his verse. The poem on Hervey is even better because more personal; it does not speak of sorrow, a vague abstraction of the odes, but describes in an intimate way the poet's deep sense of what he has lost:

“ Ye fields of Cambridge, our dear Cambridge, say,
Have ye not seen us walking every day?
Was there a tree about which did not know
The love betwixt us two?
Henceforth, ye gentle trees, for ever fade;
Or your sad branches thicker join,
And into darker shades combine,
Dark as the grave wherein my friend is laid.”¹

When we compare such a stanza with Cowley's interesting and ingenious *Ode on Wit*, we realize how far astray a false conception of poetry had led him. The elegy has the vital spark in it. One touch of deep feeling is worth all the brilliant strokes of rhetoric; judged by such a standard these lines on Hervey are not unworthy to be read with *Lycidas* and *Thyrsis*.

What Cowley failed to do was accomplished by John Dryden (1631-1700), whose Pindaric odes have both vigor of thought and dignity of expression. It is significant, however, that the greatest poet of this age should have written but three odes worthy of remembrance and but four or five short lyrics that deserve a place in anthologies. Though a few good lyrics were composed in this generation, from Dryden to the lowest poetaster, the writers lacked that gift

of song which even the humblest Elizabethan seemed to possess as a birthright. In the collected works of the dramatists and poets of this period we frequently come across sets of verses entitled "songs," but almost invariably they are merely a collection of conventional phrases that rhyme.

On the other hand, much stimulating criticism and satire of the highest order was written in verse. No one who reads it will believe that there had been a decline in the intellectual element of poetry. The wits of the Restoration poets were keen and alert, but their emotions seem deadened and their ears had grown dull. In his *Threnodia Augustalis*, a Pindaric ode on the death of Charles II, Dryden gravely proclaims the reign of Charles to be the age of verse. The "gay harmonious quire" of "officious Muses" attended him,

" And such a plenteous crop they bore,
Of purest and well-winnowed grain,
As Britain never knew before."

We can understand why Dryden flattered the King; it is difficult to see how he arrived at his opinion of contemporary poetry. Apart from this spirit of self-satisfaction, there is another reason why the lyric declined. The social life of the age forbade fineness of feeling, honest emotion, and idealism in its songs. In a period in which lampoons and doggerel satire flourished, the lyric was forgotten. The literary taste of the nation had been lowered; the *Faerie Queene* was the poem of the court of Elizabeth, but the book which Charles II carried about with him was *Hudibras*.

Dryden, then, was a man of his age; he generally lacked in his writings the melodic gift that makes a song, yet his verse was more musical than that of his contemporaries. In his *Annus Mirabilis*, written in the metre of Gray's *Elegy*, there are many passages worthy to stand in that most musical of poems; in his satires we are often as much impressed

by the sonorous ring of his couplets as by the force of their attack. He was, accordingly, admirably fitted for the Pindaric ode as Cowley wrote it.

His two best odes are *To the memory of Mrs. Anne Killigrew* and *Alexander's Feast*. The latter is the more famous chiefly because it is the more brilliant but the first ode contains the better poetry and is obviously the more sincere piece of writing. In *Alexander's Feast* the workmanship is too evident; the effects are too plainly calculated; and the poem with its constant antithesis and even epigram—"None but the brave deserve the fair"—is composed in the wits. It is not so much dramatic as it is theatrical. In extenuation, it should be remembered that Dryden wrote this poem for music and those artificial lines imitating the sounds of various instruments were designed, in part at least, to give the composer his opportunity. Judged as poetry, such writing is neither better nor worse than the couplets in Pope's *Essay on Criticism* that make the sound an echo to the sense; it is in reality a trick to catch the applause of the groundlings. Crashaw employs this same device in his *Music's Duel*, but his lines are beautiful both in phrasing and in their melody. The best writing is found in the close of this ode. As Dryden proceeds, his mind kindles, his style rises, and the well-known passage,

" At length divine Cecilia came,
Inventress of the vocal frame;"

has a rhetorical eloquence no other poet of the day could reach.

The ode on Mrs. Killigrew is written throughout in a broader style. It depends for its effect not upon verbal skill, but upon its imagination and emotional force. We see this in the opening apostrophe composed in Dryden's highest manner:

“Thou youngest virgin-daughter of the skies,
 Made in the last promotion of the blest;
Whose palms, new plucked from Paradise,
In spreading branches more sublimely rise,
 Rich with immortal green above the rest:
Whether, adopted to some neighbouring star,
Thou roll’st above us in thy wandering race,
 Or in procession fixed and regular,
 Moved with the heaven’s majestic pace;
 Or, called to more superior bliss,
Thou tread’st with Seraphim the vast abyss:”

Such verses lack the sweetness, the rich coloring, the sensuous appeal of Elizabethan poetry, but there is no fair point of comparison between such an ode and Spenser’s *Prothalamion*. If the earlier writing appeals to us more forcibly, it is because we are trained in the school of Keats and Tennyson rather than that this ode is a weak production.

We must pass over that deeply felt stanza in which Dryden laments the degradation of poetry and his own part in it, and come to the closing lines. They have a solemnity, a grave cadence which we have not heard before in the lyric:

“When in mid-air the golden trump shall sound,
 To raise the nations under ground;
When, in the valley of Jehosaphat,
The judging God shall close the book of Fate,
 And there the last assizes keep
 For those who wake and those who sleep.”

The Pindaric odes written for a century after Cowley’s death seem innumerable. They were composed on every conceivable subject from the King’s birthday to “The Intolerable Heat,” but Dryden’s odes were never approached. To read them is to see the highest development of Cowley’s *genre* until we reach our modern poets.

Dryden followed the Elizabethan custom of introducing songs freely in his dramas. To one familiar with but his

satires and his odes, it is surprising to meet him in his lighter mood.

“ Wherever I am, and whatever I do,
 My Phyllis is still in my mind;
 When angry, I mean not to Phyllis to go,
 My feet, of themselves, the way find:
 Unknown to myself I am just at her door,
 And, when I would rail, I can bring out no more
 Than, Phyllis too fair and unkind!”¹

He has many experiments in metre, from the too facile:

“ How unhappy a lover am I,
 While I sigh for my Phyllis in vain;
 All my hopes of delight
 Are another man’s right,
 Who is happy, while I am in pain!”²

to the beautifully modulated:

“ No, no, poor suffering heart, no change endeavour,
 Choose to sustain the smart, rather than leave her;
 My ravished eyes behold such charms about her,
 I can die with her, but not live without her.”³

He never, in his most tripping measures, attains the grace or the melody of the Elizabethans; he has written songs for “Aerial Spirits,” but there is no magic in them. He is at his best in a soberly modulated lyric.

“ Ah fading joy! how quickly art thou past!
 Yet we thy ruin haste,
 As if the cares of human life were few,
 We seek out new:
 And follow fate that does too fast pursue.”

¹ From the *Conquest of Granada*, Part I. See Scott-Saintsbury, *John Dryden's Works*, vol. IV, p. 85.

² *Conquest of Granada*, Part II, vol. IV, p. 187.

³ *Cleomenes*, vol. VIII, p. 292. *The Maiden Queen*, vol. II, p. 482, has another good song in this same metre.

He tries to end this with a bit of pure melody:

“Hark, hark, the waters fall, fall, fall,
And with a murmuring sound,
Dash, dash upon the ground,
To gentle slumber call.”¹

How far this is from the slumber songs we have read. In his perversion of the *Tempest*, Dryden did not shrink from adding lyrics of his own and among them, this duo between Ferdinand and Ariel:

“When the winds whistle, and when the streams creep,
Under yon willow-tree fain would I sleep.
Then let me alone,
For 'tis time to be gone,
For 'tis time to be gone.”²

Indeed it is.

The dramatic lyrics of Dryden are typical of all that the Restoration stage has to offer. Sir William Davenant (1606-1668) inherited something of the Caroline tradition yet the lyrics in his masques are devoid of merit. The folio edition of his works (1673) contains a thousand pages, but in all this vast extent of verse there is but one good song, “The lark now leaves his watery nest.” The best tragedies of the period were written by Thomas Otway (1651?-1685). His *Venice Preserved* does not contain a single lyric and the only one in *The Orphan* does not deserve citation. In *Alciabiades* there is a song on the theme of Shirley’s “The glories of our blood and state”; its inferiority measures the unhappy change that has come over Restoration verse:

“Princes that rule and empires sway,
How transitory is their state!
Sorrows the glories do allay,
And richest crowns have greatest weight.”

¹ *The Indian Emperor*, vol. II, p. 380.

² Vol. III, p. 168.

In the comedies of the day we naturally expect to find better songs; a search through them yields but little. We are not surprised that the three or four lyrics in Wycherley's plays are coarse in tone, unpoetic in diction, and altogether quite worthless, but it is disconcerting to find no good song in the dramas of such lively writers as Vanbrugh and Farquhar, who merely adapted his "Over the hills and far away," in the *Recruiting Officer*, from a popular song. William Congreve (1670-1729) has one succession of songs in his masque, *The Judgment of Paris*, and in his "opera" *Semele*, but they do not deserve a second reading. His only lyric to gain popularity is in his *Way of the World*. It begins:

" Love's but the frailty of the mind,
When 'tis not with ambition joined;
A sickly flame, which if not fed, expires;
And feeding, wastes in self-consuming fires."

This is as artificial as Waller's lyrics. It is worthy of notice that the heroine of this play is introduced repeating a lyric of Suckling's; an Elizabethan dramatist would have composed his own song.

In Congreve's *Old Bachelor*, Araminta asks the music-master for "the last new song," which he sings to her. One stanza is enough:

" Thus to a ripe, consenting maid,
Poor, old, repenting Delia said:—
' Would you long preserve your lover?
Would you still his goddess reign?
Never let him all discover,
Never let him much obtain.' "

Bellamour's opinion of this production—"I don't much admire the words"—may be taken as a final verdict upon all these lyrics. Some of the playwrights have good moments of song, but they are literally moments. Thomas Shadwell

(1642-1692) introduces many lyrics into his dramas and he has given to some of the songs in the *Royal Shepherdess* a faint touch of Elizabethan grace. More characteristic are his anapests in *Psyche*:

“ There’s none without love ever happy can be,
Without it each brute were as happy as we.

It was from such crude verse that Prior’s lightest measures were developed.¹

Sir George Etherege (1635-1691) showed in his lyrics an easy style and a lively spirit, as he does in his prose comedies. His two best songs were not written for his plays. The first pleases us by its formality, not carried to excess:

“ Ye happy swains, whose hearts are free
From love’s imperial chain,
Take warning and be taught by me,
T’avoid th’ enchanting pain.
Fatal the wolves to trembling flocks,
Fierce winds to blossoms prove,
To careless seamen hidden rocks,
To human quiet love.”

The second, entitled *Sylvia*, must rank with the best of Prior’s verses.

“ The nymph that undoes me is fair and unkind,
No less than a wonder by nature designed,
She’s the grief of my heart, the joy of my eye,
And the cause of a flame that never can die.

“ Her mouth from whence wit still obligingly flows,
Has the beautiful blush and the smell of the rose;
Love and destiny both attend on her will,
She wounds with a look, with a frown she can kill.”²

¹ *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Shadwell*, 1720, vol. II, p. 46.

² A. W. Verity, *The Works of Sir George Etherege*, London, 1888, pp. 381, 389.

II

Leaving the dramatists, we come to three well-known lyrists in Dorset, Sedley, and Rochester. Charles Sackville (1638-1706), who succeeded to the titles of Lord Buckhurst and Earl of Dorset, began life as a dissolute courtier and wit. Pepys, who might be expected to look leniently on shortcomings of conduct, speaks of him with great disapprobation and pictures him, in company with Sedley, sunk in the most degrading dissipation. Dorset outgrew this life and in later years became known as a kindly and generous patron of poets, among whom were Dryden, Butler, and Prior. They did not neglect to sing his praises and he died in the odor of poetic sanctity.

He has left but little verse—a few pages will contain it all—for like his fellows, he had little inspiration. To realize fully the variety and wealth of the Elizabethan lyric, we must contrast that age of music with this untuneful period, when a dozen stanzas would gain a reputation. Dorset gained his by a single lyric. He is fond of the anapestic measure, a metre which is as characteristic of this time as is the sonnet of Elizabethan days or the couplet of the Queen Anne period. In all his work there is an easy, good-natured tone:

“ Ah! Chloris, 'tis time to disarm your bright eyes,
 And lay by those terrible glances;
 We live in an age that's more civil and wise,
 Than to follow the rules of romances.”

He sings of no hard-hearted beauty, but of Bess, “with her skin white as milk, and her hair black as coal”:

“ But now she adorns both the boxes and pit,
 And the proudest town gallants are forced to submit;
 All hearts fall a-leaping wherever she comes,
 And beat day and night, like my Lord Craven's drums.”¹

¹ Chalmers' *English Poets*, vol. VIII, London, 1810, pp. 344, 345.

If his best song was not composed, as the tradition runs, on the eve of an engagement with the Dutch fleet, it nevertheless shows what is the most admirable trait in these later Cavaliers—a fearlessness in the presence of danger—and in its reckless tone we feel that contempt of death which the former generation would have expressed in a nobler manner. If *To Lucasta* contains the essence of the Cavalier spirit, Dorset's "To all you ladies now on land" is to an equal degree typical of the Restoration lyric. The English sailors think not of the Dutch but of the court beauties:

To pass our tedious hours away,
 We throw a merry main;
 Or else at serious ombre play;
 But, why should we in vain
 Each other's ruin thus pursue?
 We were undone when we left you—
 With a fa, la, la, la, la.

"But now our fears tempestuous grow,
 And cast our hopes away;
 Whilst you, regardless of our woe,
 Sit careless at a play:
 Perhaps, permit some happier man
 To kiss your hand, or flirt your fan.
 With a fa, la, la, la, la."¹

Truly a lively hymn before action. Throughout the eleven stanzas (this is Dorset's longest composition) the gaiety never flags.

Sir Charles Sedley (1639-1701) is a better song writer than Dorset. His touch is always graceful and light; his metres are invariably the most simple ones:

"Phillis, men say that all my vows
 Are to thy fortune paid:
 Alas! my heart he little knows
 Who thinks my love a trade.

“ Were I of all these woods the lord,
 One berry from thy hand
 More real pleasure would afford,
 Than all my large command.

“ My humble love has learned to live
 On what the nicest maid,
 Without a conscious blush, may give
 Beneath the myrtle-shade.”¹

Could the thought be more naturally expressed? We find gallantry, not love in these songs, and if the sonneteers repeated stock themes, these writers have even less to tell us. In the song from *The Mulberry Garden*, “Ah Chloris! that I now could sit, As unconcerned,” he anticipates but in no sense approaches Prior’s *To a child of quality*. Occasionally he introduces an epigrammatic turn to his verse:

“ ’Tis cruel to prolong a pain,
 And to defer a joy,
 Believe me, gentle Celemene,
 Offends the winged boy.”²

but he relies chiefly on the ease of his style.

Two other songs of Sedley deserve notice: “Phyllis is my only joy,” and *To Celia*. The latter is not only his little masterpiece, it is one of the best songs of the century, written with a feeling and in a style that could not be improved.

“ Not, Celia, that I juster am,
 Or better than the rest,
 For I would change each hour like them,
 Were not my heart at rest.

¹ *The Works of the Honourable Sir Charles Sedley*, London, 1778, vol. I, p. 101.

² P. 65.

“ But I am tied to very thee,
By every thought I have;
Thy face I only care to see,
Thy heart I only crave.

“ All that in woman is adored
In thy dear self, I find;
For the whole sex can but afford
The handsome and the kind.

“ Why then should I seek further store,
And still make love anew?
When change itself can give no more,
’Tis easy to be true.”¹

John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester (1647-1680), was the most gifted lyricist of the Restoration. His life began brilliantly and ended tragically. He fell a victim to the vices of the court set, yet his nature was essentially finer than that of a Dorset or a Sedley. Bishop Burnet’s well-known account of Rochester’s last days reveals a man gentle and generous, worthy of a better age.

There is no authoritative edition of Rochester’s writings. The scandals of his life prompted unscrupulous publishers to issue, after his death, several editions of his works. They contained many poems for which without a doubt he was not responsible. The contents of these volumes are never alike; his best lyrics appear or are excluded at haphazard, and even when an attempt is made to include his finest verses, there are serious omissions. “Why dost thou shade thy lovely face,” is a notable bit of writing; it is one of the few Restoration songs that depict deep emotion, yet it does not appear in Dr. Johnson’s *English Poets*.² Careless of fame, Rochester never collected his poetry and undoubtedly much of his work has vanished.

¹ P. 56.

² *Works of the Earls of Rochester, Roscommon, Dorset, etc., 1721*, vol. I, p. 95. Since this was written, I have learned that Rochester merely adapted this poem from Quarles’s *Emblems*, III, vii.

He was known as a wit—his epigram on “the King, whose word no man relies on,” justifies his title—and he wrote more satires than lyrics. He admired Cowley and in his *Ode to Nothing*, imitates his turn of thought; he sensibly avoided, however, the Pindaric style and preferred the manner of Dorset and Sedley. He is a better lyrist than either, for he has their ease and yet a more sincere feeling. His metres are more varied. He turns from the familiar anapests,

“ To this moment a rebel, I throw down my arms,
Great Love, at first sight of Olinda’s bright charms;”

to

“ All my past life is mine no more,
The flying hours are gone:
Like transitory dreams given o’er,
Whose images are kept in store
By memory alone.”

or to the more familiar

“ My dear mistress has a heart
Soft as those kind looks she gave me,
When, with Love’s resistless art
And her eyes, she did enslave me.”¹

The Restoration lyrists are not sharply individualized. It is never a difficult matter to distinguish the sonnets of Sidney from those of Drayton, but the songs of this age are all very much alike. Rochester stands apart from the rest; he writes with more sincerity and in a higher manner. No one of his contemporaries struck the note he reached in his “Absent from thee I languish still”:

¹ Chalmers’ *Poets*, vol. VIII, pp. 240, 242.

“ When, wearied with a world of woe,
To thy safe bosom I retire,
Where love, and peace, and truth, does flow:
May I contented there expire!

“ Lest, once more wandering from that heaven,
I fall on some base heart unblest;
Faithless to thee, false, unforgiven,
And lose my everlasting rest.”¹

III

Before coming to the song books of the Restoration, we must at least mention some of the minor writers. Charles Cotton (1630-1687), the friend of Walton, offers us a number of songs, sonnets, and Pindaric odes in his *Poems on Several Occasions* (1689), and though he is interesting when he writes on country life and especially on fishing, his best lyrics are only passable. Philip Ayres (1638-1712) deserves more consideration than he has received because he is a belated Elizabethan, the last of the Petrarchists. His *Lyric Poems made in Imitation of the Italians* (1687) is a collection of translations from Petrarch, Guarini, Tassoni, and from Spanish writers as well. Curiously enough, he states that he can find in French poetry nothing worthy of imitation. In his sonnets he has not caught the sweetness of the Elizabethans; his style is Caroline, as in his song *To the Winds*. His best sonnet, *On a Fair Beggar*, is probably a translation, yet it deserves a place in all anthologies. It is surprisingly modern in the sympathetic description of the girl, “Barefoot and ragged, with neglected hair.”²

Thomas Flatman (1637-1688) is a more important because a more original writer. In some introductory verses

¹ P. 240.

² G. Saintsbury, *Minor Poets of The Caroline Period*, Oxford, 1906, vol. II, pp. 292, 279. •

to Flatman's *Poems and Songs* (1674), Cotton calmly informs us that Pindar's touch never yielded such harmony as the odes in this book attain, but they are more notable for their thought than for their style. The poems show force and imagination, for he writes

" Verse that emancipates the mind,
Verse that unbends the soul."

He dwells on death with a morbid insistence. His "Mournful Song," as a contemporary anthology calls it, beginning "O that sad day," is his most typical lyric, resembling somewhat both in its movement and in its realism, the *Odes* of Coventry Patmore. Two of his songs, hymns for morning and evening, are quaintly but musically written, and deserve to be rescued from oblivion.¹

Thomas Traherne (1636?-1674) did not send his poems to the press; they were discovered and first published in 1903 by Bertram Dobell. They are religious lyrics; at their best, they are worthy to be ranked with Herbert's and Vaughan's, for their thought is striking, their emotion sincere, their idealism moving in its simplicity. Traherne resembles Vaughan not in his technique but in his love of the innocence and glory of childhood. "How like an angel came I down!" is his cry. The world was but another heaven:

" The skies in their magnificence,
The lively, lovely air,
Oh how divine, how soft, how sweet, how fair!
The stars did entertain my sense,
And all the works of God, so bright and pure,
So rich and great did seem,
As if they ever must endure.
In my esteem."

¹ *Poems and Songs*, 4th ed., 1686, pp. 57, 58. Rochester sneers at Flatman in his *Satire X*.

“ The streets were paved with golden stones,
The boys and girls were mine,
Oh how did all their lovely faces shine!
The sons of men were holy ones,
In joy and beauty they appeared to me,
And every thing which here I found,
While like an angel I did see,
Adorned the ground.”¹

We can not dismiss the minor poets without mentioning the renowned “Matchless Orinda,” Katherine Philips (1631-1664). Praised by Cowley and Dryden, she is far from being the “English Sappho”; she did not possess the lyrical temperament, and her work lies outside our province though she composed a few songs. Her favorite metre was the couplet, but at times, as Professor Saintsbury has pointed out, she catches the cadences of Donne and Jonson:

“ I did not live until this time
Crown'd my felicity,
When I could say without a crime,
I am not thine, but thee.

“ Then let our flames still light and shine,
And no false fear control,
As innocent as our design,
Immortal as our soul.”²

IV

We have not as yet considered the song books of the Restoration, though many of the lyrics we have quoted found

¹ Bertram Dobell, *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne*, London, 1903, p. 4.

² Saintsbury, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 537.

a place in them. Readers of Pepys' diary will remember the great delight he took in the songs of the day; his frequent references to them remind us that the Elizabethan composers were succeeded by men of no mean ability. Lawes and Purcell were names to be honored in any generation, and a glance at the list of song books published by John Playford and his son is enough to confute the oft-repeated fallacy that the Puritan revolution destroyed the popular lyric. In 1653 John Playford published *Select Musical Ayres and Dialogues in three books*. Turning over its pages we find such lyric triumphs as Herrick's "Bid me to live," and "Gather ye rosebuds"; Suckling's "I prithee send me back my heart"; and Shakespeare's "Take, O take those lips away." This same year Henry Lawes brought out his *Ayres and Dialogues*, containing poems by Lovelace, Herrick, Waller, and Carew. The Restoration composers had no such poetry to inspire them. They were forced to write new settings for old songs, to use the few lyrics of Sedley and Rochester, or as more frequently happened, to fall back on utterly trivial words. There is still some gleaning to be done in these song books, but the amount of gold in them is small when compared with the dross.

Le Prince d'Amour, or the Prince of Love. With a collection of Several Ingenious Poems and Songs by the Wits of the Age (1660), contains nearly a hundred pages of songs. If we disregard the work of the older writers, such as Raleigh and Wotton, there are not six lyrics we would read a second time. The following year appeared *An Antidote against Melancholy: made up in Pills. Compounded of Witty Ballads, Jovial Songs, and Merry Catches*, a collection that contains among other interesting pieces a *Ballad called the Green-Gown*. The tone of the song is somewhat free; we quote but the first and last stanzas. They show a splendid sense of rhythm and are written in a metre hitherto unknown:

" Pan leave piping, the Gods have done feasting,
 There's never a Goddess a hunting to-day,
 Mortals marvel at Coridon's jesting,
 That gives them assurance to entertain May.
 The lads and the lasses, with scarves on their faces,
 So lively as passes trip over the downs, (pusses?)
 Much mirth, and sport they make, running at Barley-break,
 Lord! what haste they make for a green gown.

" Bright Apollo was all the time peeping,
 To see if his Daphne had been in the throng,
 But missing her, hastily downwards was creeping,
 For Thetis imagined he tarried too long.
 Then all the troop mourned, and homeward returned,
 For Cinthia scorned to smile or to frown,
 Thus did they gather may all the long Summer day,
 And at night went away with a green gown."¹

This is quite the gem of the book; few songs of this century are more effective in their use of rhyme. The larger collection of songs that appeared this same year, *Merry Drollery or a Collection of Jovial Poems, Merry Songs, Witty Drolleries, Intermixed with Pleasant Catches, Parts I and II*,² has nothing to equal this. As illustrating the manner and morals of the time, it is important. It contains some telling satire on the Puritans, even those of New England, but its songs are of slight value.

The numerous books of drolleries, such as the *Windsor*, the *Epsom*, the *Norfolk Drolleries*, may be said to culminate in *Westminster Drolleries*, published in two parts in 1671 and 1672.³ The tone of the whole collection is struck by the

¹ P. 20. This ballad may be found in the appendix to J. W. Ebsworth's reprint of *Westminster Drolleries*. D'Urfey included it in his *Pills to Purge Melancholy*.

² Reprinted by J. W. Ebsworth, Boston, England, 1875.

³ Reprinted by Ebsworth, 1875.

opening song, ascribed to Charles II:

“ I pass all my hours in a shady old grove,
 And I live not a day that I see not my love:
 I survey every walk now my Phillis is gone,
 And sigh when I think we were there all alone.
 O then, 'tis O then, I think there's no such Hell,
 Like loving, like loving too well.”¹

The difference between the spirit of the Restoration and the spirit of the age of the Puritan revolution may be easily measured by comparing this gay trifle with the rugged lines written by the Royal Martyr when a prisoner at Carisbroke castle. In all these books there is little art; at the best the metres please by their sprightly, tripping pace. We must never look for thought or emotion in songs whose value consists in a lively lilt, indeed some of the best writing is found in burlesques, such as *The Hunting of the Gods*, whose measure recalls Father Prout's stanzas:

“ Songs of shepherds, and rustical roundelays,
 Formed of fancies, and whistled on reeds;
 Sung to solace young nymphs upon holidays,
 Are too unworthy for wonderful deeds.
 Phœbus ingenious,
 Or winged Cylenius
 His lofty genius
 May seem to declare,
 In verse better coined,
 And voice more refined,
 How states devined
 Once hunted the hare.”²

It is hardly necessary to go over the whole list of song-books, for our selections show them at their best. In *New Court Songs and Poems* by R. V. Gent, there is one lyric, entitled

¹ Vol. I, p. 11.

² Vol. II, p. 64.

Snow, worthy of notice. It is a strikingly modern poem in the metre of Gray's *Elegy*:

“ See how the feathered blossoms through the air,
 Traverse a thousand various paths, to find
On the impurer earth a place that's fair,
 Courting the conduct of each faithless wind!”¹

but we have outgrown these songs on constancy and inconstancy, all written on the same model, smooth and graceful yet without a single bold idea or splendid phrase. The lighter the thought, the better the lyric is the rule for these books. There is no personality behind these poems; they are written around a few conventional *bouts rimés*—flames, darts, woes, hearts; traitor, change, vows, range—it is generally unnecessary to read more than the end rhymes. In the preface to *Methinks the Poor Town has been troubled too long, or A Collection of all the New Songs that are generally Sung, either at the Court or Theatre* (1673), the compiler has a significant statement. “What I design is to bring that ridiculous way of printing songs out of fashion; for if a song is good, why should it be printed; if it be, in being so it is doubly spoiled [by changes and misprints] and even the name of being in print, makes it become ridiculous to that degree that you will hardly hear a printed song but in an Ale-house.” This criticism is aimed at the songs published in single sheets; many of them were the worst doggerel, but reading this very collection makes us hope that the good songs were not printed, and that the age had something better. Even such important books as Playford's *Theatre of Music or a Choice collection of the newest and best songs sung at the Court and Public theatres*, Books I-IV (1685-1687), and his *Banquet of Music* (1688) have little that is new to offer us.

¹ See G. Ellis, *Specimens of the Early English Poets*, 4th ed., London, 1811, vol. III, p. 403.

These song collections culminated in the writings of Thomas D'Urfey (1653-1723). Of French descent, possessing much of the Gallic temperament, his success was in large measure a purely personal one, for he was not only a poet and composer, but he sang his compositions with great effect. He tells us that he had sung "before their Majesties King Charles the Second, King James, King William, Queen Mary, Queen Anne, and Prince George"—he had a repertoire that suited all tastes!—and that he never went off "without happy and commendable approbation." He prided himself that he could compose appropriate melodies for any verses, no matter how difficult the metre, and that he had set to music many old songs whose rhythm would have puzzled the most skillful musician. "I must presume to say, scarce any other man could have performed the like, my double genius for poetry and music giving me still that ability which others might perhaps want."¹ It is said that he wrote one of his own songs in a most irregular metre to annoy Purcell, who was to furnish the music for it.²

As a poet, D'Urfey has two styles—he either cultivates the high Pindaric mood and loves a proudly swelling phrase, or, more frequently, writes a gay love song or a drinking catch in the most familiar tone, often far too familiar. His patriotic songs belong to his most formal attempts at verse making; Charles or George is invoked as "Great Cæsar," while the Muse, always in evidence, does her best to appear majestic:

"As far as the glittering God of day
Extends his radiant light,
Old Britain her glory will display,
In every action bright."³

¹ See the dedication to D'Urfey's *Wit and Mirth, or Pills to Purge Melancholy*, 1719-20.

² "One long Whitsun holiday," vol. I, p. 39.

³ Vol. I, p. 327.

His lighter mood is his best one. The first two volumes of the 1719 edition of his *Pills to Purge Melancholy* contain his own poems; but few of them have lived, yet his "'Twas within a furlong of Edinborough town," greatly revised, is one of the most popular of Scottish songs, and he has given several hints to Burns.¹ Doubtless he would have agreed with Moore's wish that his songs should never be read but always sung, and as we turn the pages of his book we realize that most of its attraction has gone forever. Despite his obvious faults, D'Urfey must have been an interesting person; Addison, the moralist, goes out of his way to speak a good word for him. His song book can never be reprinted; his poems rarely appear in anthologies, and he is hardly more than a name to readers of English verse. We take leave of him with one of his freshest lyrics:

"Bright was the morning, cool was the air,
Serene was all the sky;
When on the waves I left my dear,
The center of my joy:
Heaven and nature smiling were,
And nothing sad but I.

"Each rosy field did odours spread,
All fragrant was the shore;
Each river God rose from his bed,
And sighed and owned her power:
Curling their waves they decked their heads,
As proud of what they bore."²

This is not an inspired production, yet it comes from something more than a "Jockey Muse," to quote Prior's contemptuous reference to D'Urfey.

¹ Vol. I, p. 283.

² Vol. I, p. 261.

V

With this writer, we have come to the days of Queen Anne. Never was there a time in England when letters were more highly honored and yet this very period is one of the most barren epochs in the history of the lyric. It is doubtful whether another age can show such a galaxy of writers incapable of composing the song that "from the soul speaks instant to the soul." A pessimist would have declared that as the Elizabethan verse drama had passed away, so the lyric was fated to disappear, for the songs of this generation bear much the same relation to the lyrics of Campion and Shakespeare that Addison's *Cato* does to *Hamlet* or *Othello*.

The greatest personality between Milton and Byron is Jonathan Swift (1667-1745). He is the bloodhound of our literature, delighting to track down offending humanity; life offers no illusions to him and the manifest beauty in the world is hidden from his eyes. We can not expect lyrics from such a nature; the three volumes of his poems contain chiefly political and social satires. He wrote a few poor songs and early in his career tried the Pindaric ode. He showed to Dryden the one he had composed on the Athenian Society, and was told, "Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet," a frank criticism which he could not forgive. According to Dr. Johnson, this rebuff was the cause of the satirical passages Swift aimed at Dryden.

From Richard Steele (1672-1729) we expect better things. He had traits of character that his more famous contemporaries did not possess; his nature was impulsive and generous, sentimental and romantic, and the emotions that swayed him were far removed from the *sæva indignatio* of the satirists. He was the one writer of his time who idealized woman: his letters to his wife have many a line that might well be the text of a love lyric, and he should

have composed songs, neither profound nor finely wrought, but graceful and appealing. The few he has left are without importance.

Joseph Addison (1672-1719) started his literary career and gained his reputation as a poet. His *Letter from Italy* and the fortune-bringing *Campaign* have taken their place in that all-embracing collection of poems that are mentioned with respect but never read. These two productions, of course, are not lyrical, but his *Song for St. Cecelia's Day* and his opera *Rosamund* come within our field. The first is a typical and hence a mediocre Pindaric ode; the opera is such a work as a precocious schoolboy might write, and it would be unjust to his memory to quote its songs. As yet Addison had not expressed in verse his strongest feelings, but towards the close of the *Spectator* series, among the Saturday numbers in which religious topics were often discussed, he published five hymns.¹ These are among the most personal, the most emotional of lyrics. With Pope and Swift, Addison was a satirist, but unlike them, he was a kindly one. He had been brought up in a Deanery and was destined for the church; of all the Queen Anne wits, he was best adapted to continue the traditions of the religious lyric. These hymns, unconventional and free from Pindaric strokes, are the sincere and fervent expression of a pure nature deeply moved; they show a strength of feeling absent from his earlier poems and a finer and simpler style. He had read to good advantage the old ballads and it may not be fanciful to detect in these lyrics something of their influence—not in “The spacious firmament on high,” which has many touches of Queen Anne diction—but in the simpler measures of “When all thy mercies” or “How are thy servants blessed.” How modern seem those stanzas which tell of his escape while travelling in Italy:

¹ *Spectators*, Nos. 441, 453, 465, 489, 513.

“ In foreign realms, and lands remote,
Supported by thy care,
Through burning climes I passed unhurt,
And breathed in tainted air.

“ For though in dreadful whirls we hung,
High on the broken wave,
I knew thou wert not slow to hear,
Nor impotent to save.

“ The storm was laid, the wind retired
Obedient to thy will;
The sea that roared at thy command,
At thy command was still.”¹

It is little wonder that Robert Burns, reading these verses when a boy, recognized their emotional force and saw a new world in poetry. For more hymns such as these we would have spared willingly many *Spectator* papers.

There is the greatest possible contrast between the hymns of Addison and the light verse of Matthew Prior (1664-1721). Employed in his uncle's wine house, he attracted the favorable attention of the Earl of Dorset by turning into English verse an ode of Horace, and it was fitting that this slight incident decided the career of one whose poetry was so Horatian in tone. Dorset sent the lad to Westminster school, whence he proceeded to Cambridge. Shortly after leaving the university he was appointed secretary to the English ambassador at The Hague; he was ambassador at Paris when Queen Anne died, and on the accession of George I was confined in the Tower for nearly two years. He was charged with treason, but his guilt consisted in being a prominent Tory. On his release he published his poems and gained a small fortune with which he bought a country estate, Down-Hall. He lived to enjoy it but a few months.

There are not many poets whose appeal is so instant as

¹ No. 489.

Prior's, for he had the rare art of putting himself at once in the most friendly relations with the reader. He has drawn his own portrait in two poems, *The Secretary* and *For my own Monument*, and they are not formal engravings of the courtier in his periwig, but of the wit in his dressing gown. His disposition is summed up in two verses:

“ In public employments industrious and grave,
And alone with his friends, Lord, how merry was he!”¹

and as the reader is his friend, he finds him lively, witty, and charmingly humorous. Affecting in his lyrics a light-hearted tone, disdaining deep considerations on humanity at large, he is nevertheless a shrewd observer with a well-defined philosophy of life. He agreed essentially with Swift that happiness was the state of being perpetually deceived, yet he accepted this view of the world quite calmly, for he had nothing of Swift's bitterness of spirit. If, as Gay wrote, “life is a jest and all things show it,” Prior, as a humorist, was prepared to enjoy it:

“ If we see right, we see our woes:
Then what avails it to have eyes?
From ignorance our comfort flows:
The only wretched are the wise.”²

Accept Fate, be not over-curious, enjoy the passing moment, is his rule of life. There is no mystery or romance in such a nature; but at times we tire of

“ those merry blades
That frisk it under Pindus' shades.
In noble songs, and lofty odes,
They tread on stars, and talk with gods.”³

¹ A. R. Waller, *Prior, Dialogues of the Dead and other works in prose and verse*, Cambridge, 1907, p. 130.

² A. R. Waller, *Prior, Poems on Several Occasions*, Cambridge, 1905, p. 22.

³ P. 135.

From the over-seriousness of modern writing, it is a relief to turn to Prior.

As a lyric poet, he too essayed the Pindaric ode. We wonder by what process of reasoning a man of his wit could persuade himself that these odes had even dignity, to say nothing of sublimity. He parodied most effectively Boileau's *Ode sur la Prise de Namur*, but many of his own stanzas could have been ridiculed with equal justice. *Henry and Emma*, his grandiloquent version of *The Nutbrown Maid*, seems a mere burlesque on that lyrical *débat*. To read it is to perceive how thoroughly the Pindaric odes had perverted the taste of the day and how difficult was the task to restore to the lyric its old simplicity, to replace the empty phrases of false art by the language of emotion. Austin Dobson performed one of the truest services ever rendered a poet when, in his admirable *Selections from Prior*, he separated the gold from the dross.

Prior's finest lyrics are not in the series of twenty-four songs set by various composers; they are the verses he made for his own pleasure as he considered the comedy of love. Women for him were but an agreeable diversion; he watched them as one regards with interest an amusing child, and in his most delightful lines he assumes towards them the tone of an over-indulgent parent:

"Dear Chloe, how blubbered is that pretty face!

Thy cheek all on fire, and thy hair all uncurled:

Prithee quit this caprice; and (as old Falstaff says)

Let us e'en talk a little like folks of this world.

"What I speak, my fair Chloe, and what I write, shows

The difference there is between nature and art:

I court others in verse; but I love thee in prose:

And they have my whimsies; but thou hast my heart."¹

But for Stella, Swift would have despised all womankind, and the scornful frankness of his letter to a young lady on the eve of her marriage is simply astounding. Not even Iago surpassed Pope in his brutal phrase, "For every woman is at heart a rake." If Prior is free from this attitude of mind, he is equally far removed from the beauty worship of the Elizabethans, for he is ever delighted to observe the inconsistencies of woman.

" Be to her virtues very kind,
Be to her faults a little blind,"

is his motto. Though if, as we stated, he regarded woman as essentially a child, he admired childhood and has left us two of the most tender and beautiful poems to children to be found in the whole range of English verse, *A Letter to the Honourable Lady Margaret Harley* and *To a Child of Quality*, which almost deserves Swinburne's rhapsodical praise.¹ Could anything be more gracious than the whimsical, affectionate tone of the courtier of forty as he writes to the five-year-old beauty?

" For while she makes her silk-worms beds,
With all the tender things I swear,
Whilst all the house my passion reads,
In papers round her baby's hair.

" She may receive and own my flame,
For tho' the strictest prudes should know it,
She'll pass for a most virtuous dame,
And I for an unhappy poet.

" Then too alas! when she shall tear
The lines some younger rival sends,
She'll give me leave to write I fear,
And we shall still continue friends.

¹ *Dialogues*, etc., pp. 131, 85.

“ For as our different ages move,
 ’Tis so ordained, would fate but mend it,
 That I shall be past making love
 When she begins to comprehend it.”

Prior’s style has the clarity and ease which we associate with the best writers of France. Gay tried to write fables in the manner of La Fontaine and failed; Prior would have succeeded completely. The Restoration poets could assume the familiar tone, but in defiance of the injunction of Polonius, they were both familiar and by all means vulgar. They would have ruined Prior’s *A Lover’s Anger* with its delightful beginning:

“ As Chloe came into the room t’other day,
 I peevish began: ‘Where so long could you stay?
 In your lifetime you never regarded your hour;
 You promised at two; and (pray look, Child) ’tis four.’ ”

or that gay ballad of *Down-Hall*, in which the lively tone, through all its forty-three stanzas, never flags. Dobson observes that it was a “favorite with vocalists.”

In his own field, few poets can surpass Prior. His humor does not depend upon surprise and consequently we never tire of it. Cowper paid him the flattery of evident imitation and Thackeray, himself a master of this lighter style, places these lyrics “amongst the easiest, the richest, the most charmingly humorous of English lyrical poems.”¹

John Gay (1685-1732), the chief song writer of this age, offers but little material for discussion. He belonged to the set of Tory wits and writers who enjoyed his society but had little respect for him. “In wit, a man, simplicity, a child,” wrote Pope in his epitaph on Gay, and he was indeed a child and very much of a spoiled one. He constantly complained of his ill success at court; there is a querulous note in his

¹ *English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century; Prior, Gay and Pope.*

writings; and Pope in his *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* speaks bitterly of Gay's neglected merit. As a matter of fact he was not fitted for any high position; he had nothing of Prior's ability; and he was only too content to live on the bounty of others. The fortune he gained by the *Beggar's Opera* he threw away in the South Sea bubble and became largely dependent upon the hospitality of his friends.

The lyrical element in his writings is a small one. His best known poems, the *Fables*, contain but one conventional song; his *Shepherd's Week* has merely a burlesque of a lover's plaint. His finest song, *Sweet William's Farewell to Black-eyed Susan*, a graceful piece of writing, was not composed for one of his plays. It is as artificial as the song of the shepherdesses in Elizabethan pastorals:

“ All in the Downs the fleet was moored,
The streamers waving in the wind,
When black-eyed Susan came aboard,
Oh! where shall I my true love find!
Tell me, ye jovial sailors, tell me true,
If my sweet William sails among the crew.”¹

D'Urfey's Muse, according to Gay, rejoiced with Joan and Hodge over cakes and ale. Certainly there is a plebeian tone to his songs, yet he would have made his sailor speak more in character than does Gay's Sweet William:

“ If to 'far India's coast we sail,
Thy eyes are seen in diamonds bright,
Thy breath is Africk's spicy gale,
Thy skin is ivory so white.”

It would be absurd to quarrel with this lyric, written in the spirit of Watteau, because it is not realistic; it is however, utterly remote from life, and what lyric verse needed was

¹ J. Underhill, *The Poetical Works of John Gay, Muses' Library*, London, 1893, vol. II, p. 261.

not artificial prettiness but some touch of passion and imagination.

We have called Gay the chief lyrist of his age because of the great vogue of his songs in *The Beggar's Opera*. As a matter of fact, not one of them is as well written as " 'Twas when the seas were roaring" from his *The what d'ye call it*; but they caught the fancy, were sung everywhere, and made his burlesque the greatest success the English stage had seen. The song that saved the performance the first night is a fair example of all the lyrics:

" Oh, ponder well! be not severe;
 So save a wretched wife;
 For on the rope that hangs my dear,
 Depends poor Polly's life."

This is hardly a work of genius, and the best known song is little better:

" How happy could I be with either,
 Were t'other dear charmer away;
 But while thus you teaze me together,
 To neither a word will I say;
 But toll de rol."¹

Of the many songs in this opera (and we may include those in *Polly* and *Achilles*) there is not one marked by fancy or by delicacy of rhythm; of imagination or passion there is not the slightest trace. The only possible praise to be given them is that they are vivacious and well suited for music. They bear the same relation to the songs of the Elizabethan dramatists that the pickpockets and women of the town who sing them bear to Rosalind and Orlando.

We must mention two poets because each of them wrote a popular lyric. James Thomson (1700-1748), of *The Seasons*, composed blank verse tragedies in the Elizabethan

¹ Vol. II, pp. 296, 305.

manner, but with no lyrics. The six songs in his *Masque of Alfred* are unimportant with the exception of the *Patriotic Ode* with its refrain:

"Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;
Britons never will be slaves."

This note of patriotism made the song famous. Thomson was not a lyrist, and as his best critic has expressed it, he lacked the power to concentrate in a single strophe the energy of a passion or the life of the heart.¹ Henry Carey (?-1743), a mediocre poet and musician, a composer of operas and burlesques, was a most voluminous writer, publishing over two hundred works. He prided himself chiefly upon his musical ability, declaring that poetry was not his profession but his amusement.² The modern reader has no such luck, for he can get but little amusement from Carey's songs. In his best poem, his famous *Sally in our Alley*, he for once absolutely succeeded. He tells us that in this ballad he endeavored to set forth a "chaste and disinterested passion, even in the lowest class of life." Charmed with the simplicity of a shoemaker's prentice and his sweetheart, he followed them in their outing to the puppet show, Moor-fields, and the "farthing Pie-house," and sketched his poem "from nature." Its value was at once recognized; Carey declares with a touch of pride that though some ridiculed this study of low life, he was "amply recompensed by the applause of the divine Addison, who was pleased (more than once) to mention it with approbation."³

When the greatest poet of this age composed a lyric he could not equal the work of the lesser lights of Elizabeth's

¹ L. Morel, *James Thomson*, Paris, 1895, pp. 581-587.

² H. Carey, *Poems on several Occasions*, third edition, London, 1729, Preface.

³ P. 128. There is an amusing ballad on the popularity of the *Beggar's Opera* on p. 151.

day. Pope's *Ode on Solitude*, his *Dying Christian to his Soul*, and his Deistic hymn are small contributions to our subject. No poet so gifted has been more destitute of lyric inspiration. He has reflected the life of his age in his writings and he reminds us that the English lyric had never seemed nearer extinction. This poverty of song is evident in the *Miscellanies*. The fifth edition of Dryden's *Miscellanies* was published in 1727. The number of lyrics in the six volumes is surprisingly small and the greater number are by writers of the former century—Ben Jonson, Donne, Milton, Carew, Marvell, Waller—or are taken from the early Restoration *Miscellanies*. There are a few lyrics by Dorset and Prior; D'Urfey is represented by his

“The night her blackest sables wore,
And gloomy were the skies,”

but the gleanings are poor. It was not necessary for pastorals to quote Spenser, or for satires to reprint Donne, but when the age desired lyrics, the *Miscellanies* published Donne's songs by the score.

It needed a new generation to regain the lyric, for an age that sneers is rarely an age that sings. The Royal Society, founded at the Restoration, hoped to raise up “a race of young men . . . invariably armed against all the encroachments of enthusiasm.” Whatever such a race might do, it certainly could never write songs. Until there was raised up a race of young poets who could not only think deeply but feel deeply and express profound emotions in song, the lyric Muse could never re-ascend the heights from which she had been banished. To show by what paths she climbed the slopes of Parnassus (surely these classical allusions befit the Queen Anne age) must be the theme of our next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE LYRIC OF THE TRANSITION

I

We have now come to the beginnings of the romantic movement. On the borders of the new kingdom of romance and song we meet poets who explore these forgotten or undiscovered regions and yet return from time to time to their old haunts. They are writers of the transition; though they foretell the future, in all their work there is much of the thought and expression of the old school. The change that came over lyric verse was so complete that we may call it a revolution, yet no one of these writers led an open revolt against the accepted standards of taste. There was no Hugo in this movement, no self-constituted or chosen leader, no concerted plan of action. These poets worked unostentatiously, even timidly; alone, they seemed to accomplish little; together, they prepared the way for the new Renaissance in English verse.

It is not paradoxical to assert that the Queen Anne writers themselves hastened the change in taste. As if by some inexorable law, every poetic school progresses until it reaches the most fitting expression of its ideals. Until this is done, the school remains; once adequately accomplished, there is nothing to be added, no last word to be spoken, and men's minds turn elsewhere. The Restoration and Queen Anne writers had brought to perfection the lyric of polished common sense, of playful satire, of trifling fancy. It was needless to seek to improve upon Rochester and Sedley, Prior and Gay in their own fields, and accordingly there must be a new lyric.

One of the first writers to show the approaching change is William Shenstone (1714-1763). The romantic revival

meant a renewal of song; more than half of Shenstone's poems are lyrical. They have much that is old and in them the pseudo-classic diction still lingers. When he hears the birds sing in the woods, he "ranges the groves" to "explore the science of the feathered choir." He does not listen to the nightingale, he "construes its millifluent strain." In nearly every page of his lyrics we find striking and amusing examples of false diction. A lover of nature, he continually talks of the "hermit's cell," of "fountains," of "sylvan grots," the stereotyped phrases of the day. He can be as vague as Pope in his descriptions; "and where the turf diffused its pomp of flowers" presents little to the eye.

This then is the old manner in Shenstone; but there is a better side to his work. Though he writes Pindarics, and employs the measures of Sedley, he dislikes the accepted metres; in his songs and ballads, there is but one, *The Scholar's Relapse*, written in the familiar anapests of Prior. Pope in his *Elegy to the Memory of an unfortunate Lady* employs the heroic couplet; Shenstone decides that this measure is apt "to render the expression either scanty or constrained," and writes his twenty-six elegies in the metre Gray afterwards employed. Gray read Shenstone attentively and did not disdain to improve upon him:

"No wild ambition fired their tranquil breast,
To swell with empty sounds a spotless name,"

or

"Through the dim veil of evening's dusky shade,
Near some lone fane, or yew's funereal green,"¹

have certainly a familiar sound. Though Shenstone never approached Gray's melody, many of his stanzas have a graceful movement:

¹ *The Poetical Works of William Shenstone, Esq.*, London, 1798, vol. I, pp. 53, 13, Elegies xv and iv. Cf. H. A. Beers, *A History of English Romanticism in the XVIII Century*, N. Y., 1899, p. 138.

“ On distant heaths, beneath autumnal skies,
Pensive I saw the circling shade descend;
Weary and faint I heard the storm arise,
While the sun vanished like a faithless friend.”¹

His best poem, *A Pastoral Ballad* (1743), is written in anapests more musical than anything Prior attempted:

“ When forced the fair nymph to forego,
What anguish I felt at my heart!
Yet I thought—but it might not be so—
’Twas with pain that she saw me depart.
She gazed, as I slowly withdrew;
My path I could hardly discern;
So sweetly she bade me adieu,
I thought that she bade me return.”

If there is something of Prior in the turn of the last verses, the following stanza shows more love for nature than we find in any of the poets of the town:

“ My banks they are furnished with bees,
Whose murmur invites one to sleep;
My grottos are shaded with trees,
And my hills are white-over with sheep.
I seldom have met with a loss,
Such health do my fountains bestow;
My fountains all bordered with moss,
Where the hare-bells and violets grow.”²

Here we have one of the first clear indications of the new melodies English song was to gain. Often in Shenstone’s poetry we seem to hear Cowley, Sedley, or Prior, but with a difference; it is as if one should take a familiar air and weave about it new variations.

There is more that is new in Shenstone’s mood than in his style. The lyric has lost its wit, its gay recklessness; he turns to elegies which, he says, “should diffuse a pleasing

¹ Elegy vii, vol. I, p. 20.

² Vol. II, pp. 48, 49.

melancholy." Here is the new Muse, the Muse of low spirits. Shenstone loved to be alone, to take his "plaintive reed" and seek a "sequestered shade," when

" From a lone tower with reverend ivy crowned,
The pealing bell awaked a tender sigh."¹

In all this there is little real emotion; he is but an amateur in grief, and where we expect to hear the note of personal sorrow, he gives us moral platitudes, yet the change from the light-hearted lyric of the past is profoundly significant.

Our quotations have indicated another characteristic of Shenstone's writings which was to assume the greatest importance in the new lyric—a love for nature. Shenstone's estate, the Leasowes, was renowned for its artificial garden which he created;² in all the artificiality of his songs and elegies we find a genuine love of birds and flowers. In his *Ode on Rural Elegance*, after talking of the "sprightly scenes of morn," of harvests that "gild the plain," we come upon these verses:

" Lo! not an hedge-row hawthorn blows,
Or humble hare-bell paints the plain,
Or valley winds, or fountain flows,
Or purple heath is tinged in vain;
For such the rivers dash their foaming tides,
The mountain swells, the dale subsides,
E'en thriftless furze detains the wandering sight,
And the rough barren rock grows pregnant with delight."³

Shenstone is forgotten to-day, yet his *Pastoral Ballad* has lost none of its freshness. Though his elegies are unevenly written and weak in thought, they deserve remembrance, for they show the lyric in the process of transmutation.

Thomas Gray (1716-1771) was a student and a recluse.

¹ Vol. I, p. 50, Elegy xv.

² Cf. Beers, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-137.

³ Vol. I, p. 143.

Shy, sensitive, given to fits of depression ("Low spirits are my true and faithful companions," he writes), he was not the man to institute a propaganda against the Augustans, yet he is a founder of the new poetry.¹ He wrote with the most scrupulous taste, revising, rejecting, forever polishing, never satisfied; his Cambridge fellowship supplied his few wants and he felt under no necessity to publish. Such self-critical natures produce little and Gray had indeed what William Watson aptly terms a "frugal note." His poetic development was impeded by his absorption in many fields of study, for he never gave himself wholly to his art. He was a linguist with a predilection for French; a keen reader and critic of English literature; a botanist; a student of architecture; and a finished Greek scholar. Shortly before his death, Cambridge University, where he lived and died, elected him professor of Modern History.

Gray's earliest lyrics have a Queen Anne flavor. His *Ode on the Death of a favourite Cat* is quite in the style of Prior: the description of the unfortunate Selima is as neatly drawn as Pope's pictures in the *Rape of the Lock*. Gray actually began a didactic poem in the manner of Pope, *The Alliance of Education and Government*, but it is significant of his change in taste that he never finished it. His three earliest odes, *On the Spring*, *On a distant prospect of Eton College*, and the *Hymn to Adversity*, are all in the old manner. *Spring* offers us but the customary vague description, with the conventional "zephyrs" and the "Hours, fair Venus' train," together with much commonplace moralizing:

" How vain the ardour of the Crowd,
How low, how little are the Proud,
How indigent the Great!"

¹ See W. L. Phelps, *Selections from the Poetry and Prose of Thomas Gray*, Boston, 1894, p. 62. *The Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement*, Boston, 1893, by the same author should be consulted for this chapter.

In the ode a fly terms the poet "poor moralist"; the sting is deserved. In one respect the poem is unconventional; it is a spring song, yet saturated with melancholy.

His Eton ode is Addison's *Vision of Mirzah* turned into verse. Looking at a band of vigorous English schoolboys at their sports (they "urge the flying ball") he sees in his mind's eye "black Misfortune's baleful train"—Anger, Fear, Jealousy, Care—waiting in ambush for them.

"Alas, regardless of their doom,
The little victims play!"

Gray has not yet learned to prepare the reader for his mournful mood; the pessimism does not lay hold on us; and the poem lives chiefly in its concluding epigram, in the style of Pope or Congreve, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." The little known *Hymn to Adversity*, despite its personifications and its Miltonic borrowings, is the best of the three poems. Dimly suggesting Wordsworth's *Ode to Duty*, it has an impressiveness that the other poems lack; there is much more than rhetoric in it.

Had Gray written but these poems, he would be forgotten or at the best remembered for a phrase or two. His Pindaric odes are a great advance, but they too have not worn well; we regard them with respect but we do not reread them for sheer pleasure. They are deliberate attempts on his part to lead the Muse of lyric verse up the heights of Parnassus; their defect is that they are too deliberate. Gray's nature lacked enthusiasm, indeed he scorned it, and he is never with Spenser

"Rapt with the rage of his own ravished thoughts."

The effects are too nicely calculated; the curtain rises too soon and we see the scenery pulled upon the stage. As a lover of Greek poetry, he knew the greatness of Pindar and

imitates afar off the stanzaic structure of his odes. His metrical system, planned with the greatest care, does not impress the reader who rarely stops to notice the agreement of strophe with strophe, epode with epode. The form is half the charm of the *Elegy*; the odes gain little or nothing from their metrical scheme.

In the *Progress of Poesy* the reader is taken upon a high mountain and surveys the world; he sees the Muse deserting Greece for Italy, Italy for England, and witnesses a triumphal march of England's greatest singers. By the mere vastness of the view Gray hopes to thrill the reader, but a great subject does not necessarily awake emotion and the chances are that a writer will approach nearer the sublime in a poem upon a single star rather than in an ode on the solar system. Though there are eloquent passages, the whole poem seems too remote from life and it is difficult to understand how Lowell could assert that "*The Progress of Poesy* overflies all other English lyrics like an eagle."

The Bard, an ode which reflects Gray's interest in Welsh poetry, is not only more interesting but more significant. Here, in the spirit of Scott, is portrayed the aged minstrel, the last of his race, standing

"On a rock, whose haughty brow
Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood,"

chanting his imprecations on the English invaders below him. He sees "On yonder cliffs, a griesly band," his brethren, the murdered poets, who weave with their curses the "winding sheet of Edward's race." After a vision of the glories of England under the Tudors, the Bard casts himself down the cliff:

"He spoke, and headlong from the mountain's height
Deep in the roaring tide he plunged to endless night."

This ode, more spirited, more imaginative, more musical than the *Progress of Poesy*, is one of the first indications of the rediscovery of the Middle Ages.

It is curious to observe the reception these odes received. The public complained of their obscurity. "One very great man," writes Gray, "had read them seven or eight times," and has "not above thirty questions to ask," while a "lady of quality who is a great reader" never suspected that "Nature's Darling" by "lucid Avon" referred to Shakespeare or that a more detailed account of a poet who saw the secrets of the abyss and the glories of heaven

"but blasted with excess of light,
Closed his eyes in endless night,"

was a description of Milton!¹ There is not in either poem a single subtle thought and for English readers, the historical allusions can hardly be considered recondite. The trouble lay in the fact that for half a century the English lyric, if we except a few odes by Cowley and Dryden, had not risen above a superficial expression of commonplace thought and feeling.

The *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard* appeared anonymously in 1751; its first stanzas had been written nine years before and no poem of Gray's had been revised with more care. It became popular at once. Though modern historical criticism has destroyed many cherished myths, it has confirmed the well-known incident of Wolfe's quoting with admiration "The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power," the night before he fell on the Plains of Abraham. This was in 1759; in eight years the poem had become an accepted classic.

The music of the *Elegy* is more remarkable than its thought. As Lowell expressed it, Gray's originality lay in his use of the vowels:

¹ Phelps, *Thomas Gray*, p. 75.

‘The curfew tolls the knell of parting day.’

In ten syllables we have nine different vowel sounds and the modulation in stanza after stanza is exquisite. In *Cynthia*, an interminable poem in praise of Queen Elizabeth, Raleigh had employed the same metre:

“These were those marvellous perfections,
The parents of my sorrow and my envy,
Most deathful and most violent infections;
These be the tyrants that in fetters tie.”¹

The crudeness of such lines throws in relief Gray’s achievement. (He attempts no Pindaric flights; it is the sober and solemn expression of a quiet and resigned melancholy. There is no real pessimism here, no revolt at the injustice of life; his nature would have been incapable of expressing it, his style could not have risen to it. The theme of the *Elegy* and its deliberate music were wonderfully suited to Gray’s character and to the taste of the age.) Richardson’s *Clarissa Harlowe*, over which English readers loved to weep, had appeared but three years before.

Turning to the substance of the *Elegy*, we notice a sympathy for the peasant which the lyric had not hitherto expressed; the Damons of English poetry had been mere lay figures and laments at their fate had no significance. Gray finds pathos in the uneventful lives of ignorant men, in their mouldering graves of turf, in their artless epitaphs spelt by the unlettered Muse. The lyric has come closer to life. If the musical, emotional, and we may add the pictorial quality of the *Elegy* are new and altogether admirable, we can not say as much of the thought. Editors have shown a misplaced ingenuity in detecting parallels for nearly every line, but it needed little research to show that his apothegms are often unoriginal in the extreme, at times reminding us

¹ J. Hannah, *Poems of Raleigh, Wotton, etc.*, p. 39.

of the maxims of Queen Anne verse. There is, however, this all-important difference in the *Elegy*: "its moral is suffused with emotion and expressed concretely." The Augustans delivered their moral sentences as a series of cold, abstract propositions, as Pope gives us his critical maxims in the *Essay on Criticism*. Gray prepares us for his thought precisely as Hamlet takes us to the edge of the grave when he tells us to what base uses we may return.

To the average reader the *Elegy* loses its effectiveness as it draws to its close; Gray writes his own epitaph, yet there is little direct self-revelation in the poem. In this respect it is interesting to compare it with Lamartine's *Le Lac* and Hugo's *Tristesse d'Olympio*, two of the most beautiful examples of French elegy. Lamartine's poem resembles Gray's in its harmony; without adopting Gray's metre, he has much of his music. His thought is quite different from the English poet's, for the melancholy that oppresses him comes from a sense of personal loss. "Time's winged chariot" has passed swiftly by and he is left but the memory of his love. Hugo's elegy is a finer piece of work. The lover, revisiting alone his old trysting-places, finds that all is changed; even nature is not the same, for the tree whose bark they carved has been cut down and their woodland paths have been turned into highways:

"Que peu de temps suffit pour changer toutes choses!
Nature au front serein, comme vous oubliez!
Et comme vous brisez dans vos métamorphoses
Les fils mystérieux où nos cœurs sont liés!"

The French poets not only are more personal but they are more frank in their expression of grief; *la grande passion* never laid hold on Gray.

It is not in the *Elegy* but in the one sonnet Gray wrote, on the death of Richard West, that we find his personal

emotions most clearly expressed. In spite of its traces of Queen Anne diction, too severely criticised by Wordsworth, the poem is thoroughly modern in its outspoken expression of grief; the lyric is regaining its subjective quality. It is significant that Gray should have chosen for this lament the long neglected sonnet form; once more he points the way to the new lyric.

William Collins (1721-1759) was as fastidious a writer as Gray, revising and destroying his work, unable to satisfy his own standards. Such a method of composition generally means scanty production. In this case it was rendered inevitable by physical debility ending in madness. The last decade of his short life was darkened by insanity.

Gray and Collins are alike in the fact that neither poet began his career with a sudden break from the Augustan school; their progress towards romanticism was a leisurely one. Among Collins's earliest writings are a series of eclogues none the less artificial because their scene of action is a "valley near Bagdat," "the desert," or a "mountain in Circassia" instead of Arcadia or the banks of some English stream. Equally pseudo-classic in style is the verse epistle to Sir Thomas Hanmer written in the heroic couplet with reminiscences of Pope's *Essay on Criticism*:

"As Arts expired, resistless Dullness rose;
Goth, priests, or Vandals—all were Learning's foes.
Till Julius first recalled each exiled maid,
And Cosmo owned them in the Etrurian shade."¹

Though these were but early experiments which Collins abandoned as he felt the new impulses and turned towards the new lyric, yet even in his finest work we frequently hear the echoes of Queen Anne verse.

Gray tells us in his letters (among the most interesting

¹ W. C. Bronson, *The Poems of William Collins*, Boston, 1898, p. 27.

in the language) what writers he admired and what were his ideals in writing; it is in his poems alone that we see the mind of Collins. At the first reading we are struck by his outspoken admiration for the Greek lyric. The Augustans were Latin in their sympathies, their models were Juvenal and Martial, Virgil and Horace, poets from whom Collins turns to "revive the just designs of Greece." In English literature his admirations were Shakespeare, Spenser, and above all Milton, the Milton of the minor poems. More than any other piece of writing, *Il Penseroso* inspired the poetry of the mid-century. We feel its quiet melancholy from Gray's *Elegy* to the humblest verses forgotten in the columns of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, while its personifications, "spare Fast," "retired Leisure," the "cherub Contemplation," are undoubtedly responsible for the endless train of allegorical figures that stalk through the odes of the period.

Collins prefixed to his *Odes* (1746) three verses from Pindar asking for "boldness" and "resistless force" in his poetry, and it is apparent that he wished to appeal to the imagination and to move the deepest feelings. Temperamentally unfitted for Pindar's style, his effort to follow him even afar off explains a certain artificiality and coldness which we discover in many of the odes. He deals in abstractions; he writes poems to Pity, Mercy, Fear, Peace, but these qualities never really possess him; his subjects are too deliberately chosen; they do not embody his desires or his feelings. We see this especially in the *Ode to Liberty*. It belongs to what we may call the panoramic school of poetry; in it we are shown Greece and Rome, Venice and Switzerland, and finally Liberty in England. There is in all this no cry of revolt, no shadow of impending revolution, no desire to defend or arouse the oppressed. The ending is undoubtedly the weakest part of the ode, but we cite it because it emphasizes the lack of "boldness" and "resistless force." Liberty is welcomed to England:

“ Her let our sires and matrons hoar
 Welcome to Britain’s ravaged shore;
 Our youths, enamoured of the fair,
 Play with the tangles of her hair;
 Till, in one loud applauding sound,
 The nations shout to her around,
 ‘ O how supremely art thou blest!
 Thou, lady, thou shalt rule the West!’ ”¹

The *Odes*, neglected to-day, were coldly received when they appeared. *The Passions*, often set to music, proved the most popular; it is by no means the best, although it has something of the effectiveness of Dryden’s *Alexander’s Feast* and should be read side by side with it.

The *Odes* fail, then, not because of their diction or their music, but because they deal too much in abstract qualities. When the ballad makers wished to inspire fear or pity they did not invoke

“ Thou to whom the world unknown
 With all its shadowy shapes is shown;”

or

“ The Friend of man assigned
 With balmy hands his wounds to bind,”

they showed us the three sons taking leave of the Wife of Usher’s Well or Lady Margaret in her burning castle hearing the cries of her children. Spenser is deeply moved by the misfortunes of Una; nothing under heaven stirs his compassion as “beauty brought t’unworthy wretchedness,” and he feels his heart

“ perst with so great agonie,
 When such I see, that all for pittie I could die,”

yet few readers find genuine pathos in the distress of this allegorical character. Accordingly the best odes Collins wrote have but few of these figures which belong to the

masque and not to the drama of life. His *Ode to Simplicity*, the finest product of his Greek studies, is worthy of its subject; there is no attempt for the sublime, no startling antitheses, but a purely drawn picture and a gentle and tender music. The ode written for those who fell fighting against the Pretender is as flawless a gem as the Greek anthology can offer, a perfect dirge in twelve lines. The personifications that mar the other odes are exquisite here:

“ When Spring, with dewy fingers cold,
Returns to deck their hallowed mold,”

or

“ There Honour comes, a pilgrim grey,
To bless the turf that wraps their clay.”

The lyric Muse sang for the Stuart cause; this is the one English lyric that vies with the Jacobite songs for Bonnie Charlie. Had Collins written but this, his name would have remained.

The *Ode to Evening* is his masterpiece. It is *Il Penseroso* once more. No personal sorrow moves us; but that vague melancholy which the approach of night brings. So perfect is the modulation of the verse that though the ear expects rhyme it does not feel cheated by the unrhymed measure:

“ But when chill blustering winds, or driving rain,
Forbid my willing feet, be mine the hut
That from the mountain's side
Views wilds, and swelling floods,

“ And hamlets brown, and dim-discovered spires,
And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all
Thy dewy fingers draw
The gradual dusky veil.”¹

That atmosphere which modern poets seek so earnestly to create is ever apparent here. Were it not for the disturbing

¹ P. 54.

stanza that concludes^d the ode, it would rank with the most perfect accomplishments of English lyrists.

This, then, is Collins's field, the awakening of tender emotion; his song for Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* gains this effect and his lament for Thomson is in the same strain:

“ Remembrance oft shall haunt the shore

When Thames in summer wreaths is drest,

And oft suspend the dashing oar

To bid his gentle spirit rest.”¹

yet Collins was capable of writing in a larger, broader style. The unfinished *Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland, considered as the subject of poetry*, shows a strength both of thought and of diction found in no other one of his poems. Here he is possessed of his subject; he writes, not of Superstition, hateful Goddess, but of the weird beliefs of the Highland peasants—of second sight, of wizards, of kelpies—enthusiastically urging his friend to embody them in verse. He has caught the tone of mystery and awe; there is more terror in his single stanza depicting a herdsman drowned by a water sprite than in all his *Ode to Fear*. Not only is this poem of the highest importance as foreshadowing the romantic school (Lowell remarks that it contains the whole school in the germ) but it is equally notable in its sure indication that Collins, had he lived, would have gained some of that power he so admired in the Greek lyric.

II

We now approach the minor lyrists of the age and those greater writers who occasionally tried their hand at lyric verse, though with no marked success. To the first group belong the Wartons.

Both Joseph Warton (1722-1800) and Thomas Warton (1728-1790) were avowed imitators of Milton. They came

¹ P. 65.

by their admiration for him honestly; their father, Thomas Warton (1687-1745), a writer of verse epistles, imitations of Horace, and typical Queen Anne satires, had felt the influence of *Il Penseroso*:

“ Nymphs of the groves, in green arrayed,
Conduct me to your thickest shade,
Deep in the bosom of the vale,
Where haunts the lonesome nightingale,
Where Contemplation, maid divine,
Leans against some aged pine,
Wrapt in solemn thought profound,
Her eyes fixed stedfast on the ground.”¹

The sons were not content with occasional borrowing, for their whole spirit was Miltonic; the revolt of Gray and Collins against the pseudo-classic standards was implied rather than expressed, but the Wartons were openly defiant. Joseph Warton, whose *Essay on Pope* (1756-1782) is the first important critical document of the new school of poetry, was a lesser poet than his brother. His odes *To Health*, *To Liberty*, *To Fancy* resemble the odes of Collins but are less interesting; it is instructive to compare Warton's *Ode to Content* with the *Ode to Evening*, for though Warton uses its unrhymed stanza, he can not catch its music:

“ Hail, meek-eyed maiden, clad in sober gray,
Whose soft approach the weary woodman loves,
As, homeward bent to kiss his prattling babes,
He jocund whistles through the twilight groves,”²

To-day he is little read because in his own field he is surpassed by his brother, to say nothing of Gray and Collins.

Thomas Warton began his career by composing when seventeen a poem in blank verse, entitled significantly *The*

¹ Thomas Warton, *Poems on Several Occasions*, London, 1748, p. 15.

² *Poems of Dr. Joseph Warton* in Chalmers' *English Poets*, vol. XVIII, p. 167.

Pleasures of Melancholy. In addition to the Miltonic cast of the rhapsody, it is interesting to notice the young poet's enthusiasm for Spenser, whom he prefers to Pope. *The Rape of the Lock*, he tells us, does not please him, for

"The gay description palls upon the sense,
And coldly strikes the mind with feeble bliss."

and Belinda, "in all the lustre of brocade," must yield to Una. The influence of Spenser, however, is felt in the descriptive poems of this period and not in the lyrics. Warton's *Odes*, published the same year Collins sent his to the press, are valuable not as works of art but as illustrating the progress of the lyric. His style is an intimate one and he speaks with the utmost freedom of his tastes and desires. His personality, however, was not strong enough to find its own method of expression; admiring Milton, he is not content to catch a hint or to reflect his spirit, but he plunders whole passages. In two respects he shows originality: he is a lover of nature and as he tells us in his sonnet on Stonehenge, he delights "to muse on many an ancient tale renowned." Warton's position as a leader in the new nature poetry has not been sufficiently recognized; all through his poems are passages of sympathetic observation of birds and flowers that have by no means lost their charm:

"Midst gloomy glades, in warbles clear,
Wild nature's sweetest notes they hear;
On green untrodden banks they view
The hyacinth's neglected hue:
In their lone haunts, and woodland rounds,
They spy the squirrel's airy bounds:
And startle from her ashen spray,
Across the glen, the screaming jay."¹

¹ Richard Mant, *The Poetical Works of the late Thomas Warton*, Oxford, 1802, vol. I, p. 125. Cf. *Ode on the First of April*, *Ode on the Approach of Summer*.

Not only in his *History of English Poetry*, but in all his writings Warton showed the fascination which "the chronicles of wasted time" possessed for him, and the age of chivalry inspired him as it did Scott; there is much of the author of *Ivanhoe* and *Marmion* foreshadowed in Warton's two odes, *The Crusade* and *The Grave of King Arthur*. The first ode, the most spirited of Warton's poems, is supposed to be composed by Cœur de Lion and Blondel.

"Salem, in ancient majesty,
Arise, and lift thee to the sky!
Soon on thy battlements divine
Shall wave the badge of Constantine.
Ye Barons, to the sun unfold
Our cross with crimson wove and gold!"¹

The Grave of King Arthur is descriptive rather than lyrical; it stirs the imagination especially by its use of names that carry with them the glamour of romance:

"O'er Cornwall's cliffs the tempest roared,
High the screaming sea-mew soared;
On Tintagel's topmost tower
Darksome fell the sleety shower."²

In lyrical poetry it is unfortunate that the anthologist and not the critic has often decided what verses shall be rescued from "Time's fell hand." Neither the *Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics* nor the *Oxford Book of English Verse* includes any one of Warton's nine sonnets. Two should be found in every comprehensive anthology of English lyrics. The sonnet written in Dugdale's *Monasticon* is a restrained yet an eloquent defense of the antiquary, "of painful pedantry the poring child," for Warton has found that

¹ Vol. II, p. 49.

² Vol. II, p. 58.

“ Nor rough, nor barren, are the winding ways
Of hoar Antiquity, but strown with flowers.”

The first four verses of the sonnet to the river Loddon are enough to save it:

“ Ah! what a weary race my feet have run,
Since first I trod thy banks with alders crowned,
And thought my way was all through fairy ground,
Beneath thy azure sky, and golden sun.”¹

If life had brought disillusionments, Warton could comfort himself with the thought that his days had not been useless, “nor with the Muse’s laurel unbestowed.”

The two great contemporaries of the Wartons, Goldsmith and Johnson, were unmoved by the new lyric poetry; or rather, Johnson was moved to ridicule the

“ Uncouth words in disarray,
Tricked in antique ruff and bonnet,
Ode, and elegy, and sonnet.”

He wrote a few odes—not Pindarics; a single stanza sufficiently illustrates their quality:

“ Now o’er the rural kingdom roves
Soft Pleasure with her laughing train,
Love warbles in the vocal groves,
And vegetation plants the plain,”²

Respect for a great name prohibits further quotation. Goldsmith (1728-1774), always the idyllic poet even when he writes his novel, has left but one good lyric, “When lovely woman stoops to folly.” Sung by Olivia in the *Vicar of Wakefield*, its effectiveness is due principally to its setting.

¹ Vol. II, pp. 150, 160.

² T. M. Ward, *The Poems of Johnson, Goldsmith, Gray, and Collins, Muses’ Library*, London, 1905, pp. 89, 72.

There are many lyrics in Goldsmith's *Oratorio* but they are all unimportant:

“ Hope, like the taper's gleamy light,
Adorns the wretch's way,
And still, as darker grows the night,
Emits a brighter ray.”¹

is a typical stanza. The revival of lyric verse, so successfully inaugurated by Gray, Collins, and the Wartons, met with no support from the accredited leaders of English thought. Only in the Queen Anne age have the chief writers of a period in which letters flourished been so destitute of the lyric impulse.

The drama of the day contained lyrics, but few possess the least merit. In the *Duenna* Sheridan inserted a number of songs.

“ I ne'er could any lustre see
In eyes that would not look on me;”

and the more familiar, “Had I a heart for falsehood framed,” show a certain skill of expression; “Here's to the maiden of bashfull sixteen,” in the *School for Scandal* has an attractive liveliness, but such lyrics have little substance, and a single phrase from Dekker's or Shakespeare's songs is worth them all.

One writer for the theatre deserves remembrance for his lyrics. Charles Dibdin (1745-1814), actor, dramatist, composer, singer, was a popular figure during the last three decades of the century. Of an attractive personality, with “a voice of no great power or compass but of a sweet and mellow quality,” his dramatic entertainments depended upon his songs for their success. As an admirer has pointed out, he was the last of the bards; Moore used well-known Irish melodies, but Dibdin invariably composed the music for his

¹ P. 190.

verses.¹ He was a most voluminous writer; he produced some nine hundred songs and claimed that he had written the words and music of the best ones in less than an hour.

Dibdin essayed all types of lyrics—love songs, hunting songs, war songs, Irish and Scottish songs—but his sailor songs, though uninspired, contain his most genuine and his most skillful writing. He had never shipped before the mast, yet he became the laureate of the British tar, giving to him the same popularity that Kipling's *Barrack Room Ballads* brought to the soldier in India, with this difference: that Dibdin lacked the modern poet's realism, narrative power, and dramatic force. His sailor is a sentimental, idealized figure, fearless, patriotic, and above all, a faithful lover of his Poll. Dibdin wrote in an easy, swinging style and from his first lyric of the sea:

“ Blow high, blow low, let tempests tear
The mainmast by the board;”

until his last:

“ Some sweetheart or wife that he loved as his life
Each drank, while he wished he could hail her;
But the standing toast that pleased the most
Was—the wind that blows, the ship that goes,
And the lass that loves a sailor!”²

he could boast that English sailors had made his songs their own. For the modern reader they do not strike deep enough, and though they are the best in the drama from 1750 to the close of the century, they are quite forgotten; even *Tom Bowling*, a “sailor's epitaph” on his own brother and the finest example of his serious style, has disappeared from most anthologies.³

The poetical miscellanies of the day can not claim our

¹ G. Hogarth, *The Songs of Charles Dibdin*, London, 1842, p. xxvii.

² Pp. 28, 81.

³ P. 97.

attention.¹ Their only good lyrics were those poems by Gray, Collins, or Warton which we have already considered; their numerous imitations of these writers—especially the interminable elegies—are not amusing enough to be considered unconscious parodies. As for the song books of the day, the “Songsters” and “Jovial Companions,” their only good lyrics were the old ones and in these compilations we frequently go back to Elizabethan times. There was much verse published in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, established 1731, but it is astonishing to see there the Queen Anne tradition long surviving in satire and verse epistle. One may dismiss the minor poets of the day with a single phrase—they were hopelessly dull and uninspired. One Miscellany, however, was epoch-making—Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, 1765. In this book were brought to light again not only the best of the old ballads but some of the finest of the old lyrics: songs from Harleian MS. 2253, Chaucer, and from *Tottel’s Miscellany*; the most characteristic stanzas of Daniel and Drayton, Lyly and Shirley, Raleigh and Wotton, Carew, Suckling and Lovelace. Such poems were a more enduring source of inspiration than the much-followed odes of Gray and Collins and the next generation of writers found in this collection many hints for their finest achievements. Age had not withered the infinite variety of these songs which showed a new race of poets that the noblest thoughts and the strongest emotions needed no Pindaric lyre.

III

A special province of lyric verse—the hymns of the church—demands our attention at this point. When Sternhold, about 1547, published nineteen psalms in the simple and popular ballad stanza, he unconsciously decided the form

¹ See for example, *A Collection of Poems in four volumes, By several hands*, J. Dodsley, London, 1783.

for countless religious songs. No one has attempted to estimate the number of hymns written in the eighteenth century; it is certain, however, that in this great mass of poetry there is very little that shows artistic excellence. Of the vast majority of hymn writers it may be asserted as a general rule that their spirit is willing but their style is weak.

We retrace our steps to the previous age and find in the writings of Thomas Ken (1637-1711), bishop of Bath and Wells, the first indications of the hymn writing which was later to accompany the religious awakening and the rise of the Methodists. Ken was an eloquent preacher, a musician, and a poet who essayed in vain the epic style. The three hymns published in the *Manual of Prayers for the use of Winchester scholars* contain his best writing; two of them, "Awake, my soul, and with the sun," and "Glory to thee, my God, this night," have become religious classics.

A much more voluminous writer was the dissenter Isaac Watts (1674-1748), who composed some six hundred hymns and versions of the Psalms. He published in 1706 *Horæ Lyricæ*, a volume which included several odes showing faint traces of Cowley; Watts speaks of his "bold harp profusely played, Pindarical," but with the exception of "profusely," his view of his work is quite erroneous. Dr. Johnson, who admired the character of Watts, found it difficult to comment upon his poetry. He could, however, bestow on him the praise "the general interest of mankind requires to be given to writers who please and do not corrupt, who instruct and do not decoy." The bare possibility of the author of "Let dogs delight to bark and bite," and "How doth the little busy bee," corrupting and decoying is delicious. Unlike Crashaw and Vaughan, he has no mistress, real or supposed.

" No Phyllis shall infect the air,
With her unhallowed name."¹

¹ "Meditation in a grove" in *Horæ Lyricæ*.

His original hymns often attain a noble dignity and are not without imaginative lines:

“ Lord of the armies of the sky,
He marshals all the stars,
Red comets lift their banners high,
And loud proclaim his wars.”¹

while his versions of the psalms, by no means mere paraphrases, have at times a simplicity and a directness of expression which makes them altogether worthy to be placed beside the canticles from which they were taken. “God is a refuge for his saints” and “Our God, our help in ages past” are his masterpieces. His *Divine Songs for Children* (1715), which have given many phrases to the language and which, in certain lines dimly foretell Blake, contain his tender and pathetic “Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber,” sung more than any other English cradle song. If popularity alone determined worth, Watts would be one of our greatest poets.

The tradition of Watts was continued by John Wesley (1703-1791) and his brother Charles (1708-1788), a better poet whose style is more vigorous than that of Watts but who has given less to our hymnals. Among other famous hymns of the period are Toplady's (1740-1788) “Rock of Ages,” Skelton's (1707-1787) “Jesus, lover of my soul,” Newton's (1725-1807) “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds,” and Williams's (1717-1791) “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah.” It is a strange fact that the eighteenth century, popularly considered to be spiritually dead, has expressed most effectively in song those religious feelings which move all types of character.²

¹ *God's Dominion and Decrees.*

² Cf. Book II of F. T. Palgrave's *The Treasury of Sacred Song*, Oxford, 1890. This is the best anthology of religious verse.

Christopher Smart (1722-1770) and William Cowper (1731-1800) are distinguished from these religious poets because they wrote on secular as well as upon divine themes. Smart had an unhappy life, descending from a fellowship in Pembroke College, Cambridge, to the precarious existence of Grub Street. His *Song to David*, composed while confined in a madhouse, was published in 1763. It is one of the most remarkable poems of the century, unevenly written yet ranging from the pathetic to the sublime and in turn tender, lofty, and impassioned in its expression. It has a peculiar quality; there is nothing in contemporary writing to compare with such stanzas as:

“ Sweet is the dew that falls betimes,
And drops upon the leafy limes;
Sweet Hermon’s fragrant air:
Sweet is the lily’s silver bell,
And sweet the wakeful tapers’ smell
That watch for early prayer.”

or

“ Glorious the northern lights a-stream;
Glorious the song, when God’s the theme;
Glorious the thunder’s roar:
Glorious Hosannah from the den;
Glorious the catholic Amen;
Glorious the martyr’s gore.”

The mysticism and emotional force of the poem were beyond the taste of the day; the editor of *The Poems of the late Christopher Smart, in two volumes*, Reading, 1791, did not reprint it, for he included only “such poems as were likely to be acceptable to the reader.”¹

¹ The poem, half lyrical and half descriptive, consists of eighty-six stanzas. See *A Song to David by the late Christopher Smart*, London, 1819. The *Oxford Book of Verse*, p. 538, prints eighteen stanzas. Smart’s pathetic *Hymn to the Supreme Being* has been too much overshadowed by the *Song*.

William Cowper, like Smart, brooded over his imagined wickedness until he believed himself to be a spiritual outcast, doomed to destruction. At one time he found relief in reading Herbert's *Temple*, but his relatives caused him to lay aside the book, fearing that it increased his morbid tendencies. This religious melancholia resulted in temporary insanity and he was confined in a madhouse; from such bitter experience sprang his hymns. Written in conjunction with his friend John Newton, the *Olney Hymns*, sixty-seven of them by Cowper, appeared in three books in 1779. In general, little individuality can be shown in these religious songs, for the limitations of the form and even of the vocabulary are very definite ones and the tendency is to cast all spiritual thought and emotion in purely conventional molds. Cowper's finest hymns, however, are readily differentiated from those of Watts or Ken by their intensity of feeling and by their more intimate tone. "Hark, my soul! it is the Lord," "God moves in a mysterious way," and "Oh! for a closer walk with God" are the very flower of the religious lyrics of the eighteenth century.¹

One could scarcely expect to find in the writer of these hymns a worthy follower of Prior. In his early poems Cowper plainly imitated Waller, Sackville, and the Queen Anne lyrists, but above all, "dear Mat Prior's easy jingle."

"Matthew, (says Fame) with endless pains
Smoothed and refined the meanest strains;
Nor suffered one ill-chosen rhyme
To escape him, at the idlest time;
And thus o'er all a lustre cast,
That, while the language lives, shall last."²

We do not need this eulogy to show us where Cowper found his model for such lines as:

¹ H. S. Milford, *The Complete Poetical Works of William Cowper*, Oxford, 1907, pp. 444, 455, 433.

² P. 268.

"Let her guess what I muse on, when rambling alone
I stride o'er the stubble each day with my gun,
Never ready to shoot till the covey is flown.

"Let her think what odd whimsies I have in my brain,
When I read one page over and over again,
And discover at last that I read it in vain."¹

He has Prior's light and graceful manner of description:

"The black bird has fled to another retreat
Where the hazels afford him a screen from the heat,
And the scene where his melody charmed me before,
Resounds with his sweet-flowing ditty no more."²

Such a stanza might have come from *Down-Hall*. Cowper has absolutely caught Prior's gayety, his kindly humor, his whimsical manner of alluding to himself:

"These carpets, so soft to the foot,
Caledonia's traffic and pride!
Oh spare them, ye knights of the boot!
Escaped from a cross-country ride!
This table and mirror within,
Secure from collision and dust,
At which I oft shave cheek and chin,
And periwig nicely adjust."³

If Cowper, in his lighter moods, turned back to the days of Anne, in his deeper moments he anticipated the simplicity and the pathos of Wordsworth. His easy, unadorned style did not desert him when he expressed the strongest emotions; his words sink deeply because they are spoken so quietly.

His poem on Selkirk, "I am monarch of all I survey"—a lyrical monologue—has achieved an unjustified popularity. It has little imagination or feeling and reads as though it

¹ P. 270.

² P. 362.

³ P. 378.

had been written not by a castaway but by a beau in a coffee house. His dirge on the loss of the "Royal George" possesses, as Palgrave has pointed out, a "bare and truly Greek simplicity of phrase"; there could be no greater contrast to the pride, pomp and circumstance of the Pindaric odes than these verses, simple as the old ballads:

" It was not in the battle,
No tempest gave the shock,
She sprang no fatal leak,
She ran upon no rock;
His sword was in the sheath,
His fingers held the pen,
When Kempenfelt went down,
With twice four hundred men."¹

Cowper is most inspired when he writes of his own life and two poems expressing his devotion for Mary Unwin are among the most sincere and affecting lyrics in the language.² There are many sonnets better constructed than *Mary! I want a lyre with other strings*, but none more beautiful or heartfelt in the intimate revelation of admiration and love. This poem and *To Mary* stand alone in this century, for Cowper's deeply felt verses on his mother's picture, *Oh that those lips had language*, are not lyrical in form. One feels in reading these two lyrics a sense of constraint as when some intimate conversation is overheard, for here we have "such fair question as soul to soul affordeth." *To Mary* is more affecting than the sonnet; its quiet metre, its homely pictures, its frank realism, its avoidance of the slightest trace of sentimentality render the emotion so poignant that Palgrave is justified in declaring that "Cowper is our highest master in simple pathos."³

¹ P. 344. One is hardly prepared to follow Palgrave in making of this poem a touchstone of the reader's taste.

² Pp. 421, 427.

³ *Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics*, notes.

IV

Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770) and William Blake (1757-1827), the heralds of the romantic movement, stand apart from and above the poets of their day. Both were of imagination all compact; and though their visions beheld two different worlds, we may consider them together.

Chatterton, apprenticed to an attorney, recreated Bristol of the fifteenth century and wrote, in what he believed to be middle English, poems that he attributed to Thomas Rowley, a purely imaginary character. He went to London to try his fortune; within four months he found himself alone and starving—and took poison. But one of his Rowley poems had been printed; they were published in 1777.

The tragedy of his life profoundly impressed the poets of the next generation. To Wordsworth he was “the marvellous Boy”;¹ Coleridge, who called him

“the wondrous boy,
An amaranth, which earth seemed scarce to own,”²

wrote an impassioned *Monody on the Death of Chatterton*, dwelling more upon the “story of his woes” than upon his poetry. Keats writes a sonnet to the “Dear child of sorrow—son of misery!” and dedicates *Endymion* to his memory. It was, however, a Frenchman who paid the most striking tribute to him. Alfred de Vigny’s *Chatterton*, acted at the Théâtre Français in 1835, is a protest against the “perpetual immolation of the poet,” to use the language of his emotional preface, and an attack on society which neglects the artist and even forces him to his doom. De Vigny regarded Chatterton as the personification of neglected genius and accordingly his drama is a rhapsody. We find Chatterton in love with a certain Kitty Bell, humiliated by super-

¹ *Resolution and Independence.*

² *On Observing a Blossom on the First of February, 1796.*

cilious noblemen, his companions at Oxford, and upbraided by the Lord Mayor of London because he writes verses! This stony-hearted dignitary offers the penniless boy the position of *valet de chambre*; rather than degrade himself and renounce his art, the poet dies and with him, Kitty Bell.

Knowing Chatterton's history, it is difficult to judge his writings impartially. That strangest of fathers, Patrick Brontë, wishing his children, mere babes, to "speak with less timidity," gave them a mask and told them "to stand back and speak boldly under cover of it" in answer to his questions.¹ This method certainly elicited remarkable replies. When Chatterton wrote with no mediæval disguise, he was merely an imitative, precocious boy; when he assumed the mask of Rowley, he was a poet. His acknowledged verses are noteworthy not for their quality but because of the circumstances under which they were written. They are quite conventional and there is little difficulty in discovering his models:

"Wet with the dew the yellow hawthorns bow;
The rustic whistles through the echoing cave;
Far o'er the lea the breathing cattle low,
And the full Avon lifts the darkened wave."²

In the Rowley poems also Chatterton followed models. His masterpiece, *The Ballad of Charity*, written during his last weeks in London, is the story of a mediæval good samaritan told with Spenser's color and rich detail; the *Bristowe Tragedy* harks back to the ballads in the *Reliques*, yet in these poems is a quality all his own. From dictionaries, from Chaucer and Spenser, he had made for himself a glossary of ancient words and phrases often curiously inaccurate and erroneous; as Jonson said of Spenser, "he writ

¹ Mrs. Gaskell, *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, chapter III.

² W. W. Skeat, *The Poetical Works of Thomas Chatterton*, London, 1871, I, p. 55.

no language."¹ Composing the Rowley poems in this strange dialect, his mind seemed to take on the very color of the mediæval world. If Professor Beers finds the best quality of his verse to be its unexpectedness—"sudden epithets of a wild and artless sweetness"—certainly the best quality of his mind is its intuitive perception of the romance and mystery of the past.

The lyrical element in the Rowley poems is not their chief one; the poems to which we have just alluded are, with most of his work, descriptive and narrative. His best songs are in his tragedy of *Aella*. The stanzas sung by the third minstrel show a lusciousness of phrase that must have attracted Keats:

"When Autumn sere and sunburnt doth appear,
With his gold hand gilding the falling leaf,
Bringing up Winter to fulfil the year,
Bearing upon his back the ripened sheaf,
When all the hills with woody seed are white,
When lightning-fires and gleams do meet from far the sight;

"When the fair apples, red as evening sky,
Do bend the tree unto the fruitful ground,
When juicy pears, and berries of black dye,
Do dance in air, and call the eyes around;
Then, be the evening foul, or be it fair,
Methinks my heart's delight is mingled with some care."

The "song by Syr Thybbot Gorges," who by a miracle must have foreseen the Restoration writers, has the lilt of Prior:

"She said, and Lord Thomas came over the lea,
As he the fat deerkins was chasing,
She put up her knitting, and to him went she;
So we leave them both kindly embracing."

¹Cf. Skeat's *Essay on the Rowley Poems*, vol. II.

His finest lyric is a dirge, reminiscent of Ophelia's song:

" Oh, sing unto my roundelay,
Oh, drop the briny tear with me,
Dance no more on holiday;
Like a running river be.
My love is dead,
Gone to his death-bed,
All under the willow-tree.

" See! the white moon shines on high,
Whiter is my true love's shroud,
Whiter than the morning sky,
Whiter than the evening cloud.
My love is dead,
Gone to his death-bed,
All under the willow-tree."¹

Chatterton saw instinctively the poetry in

" old, unhappy, far off things
And battles long ago."

Richard Cœur de Lion and his knights, the pomp and pageantry of mediæval tournament and battle, inspired him as they did Scott; with more knowledge and with greater maturity, Chatterton and not the Wizard of the North would have been the great revealer of romance. If we compare him with the mediævalists of his day—with Thomas Warton, for example—we see that Warton was painstaking while Chatterton was imaginative. Short as was his life, his position as poet-artist is secure.

William Blake (1757-1827), an "enthusiastic, hope-fostered visionary," as he once subscribed himself, was the

¹ Vol. II, pp. 38, 40, 71.

son of a London hosier. At the age of ten, he was placed in a small drawing school; at fourteen he was apprenticed to an engraver who sent the boy for his training to copy the monuments and tombs in Westminster Abbey. Blake was, accordingly, self-taught; his lack of formal instruction is manifest in all his drawings—their faults of anatomy and of perspective are apparent to the most untrained eye—but such a nature must find its own method of expression. In 1783 he published a slender collection of verses, *Poetical Sketches*; his *Songs of Innocence* appeared six years later, and his *Songs of Experience* in 1794.¹ The *Sketches* was the only volume to be published in the ordinary fashion; his other writings he printed himself from copper plates upon which he had engraved both his poems and the designs that weave themselves around them. As if this were not labor enough, the printed pages he colored by hand. This slow method of production was not a good means for bringing Blake's poetry before the reading public; his books were practically unknown and whatever fame he acquired came to him from the engravings he made for the writings of others, such as his wonderful plates for Blair's *Grave*. Contemporary references to Blake speak of him as an artist and not as a poet.

Although Blake felt that he had received a divine command to write and that he must "speak to future generations by a sublime allegory," he was not ambitious in the accepted sense of the word. He wrote, "I am more famed in Heaven for my works than I could well conceive," and to deliver his message was his one concern.² All his life he was poor; but for the help of friends he would have been destitute. He was, nevertheless, an indefatigable worker, at one time so absorbed in his writing and drawing that he did not leave

¹ J. Sampson, *The Poetical Works of William Blake*, Oxford, 1905.

² A. G. B. Russell, *The Letters of William Blake*, London, 1906, p.

his house for two years. He stated that in addition to all his printed work he had composed six or seven epics as long as Homer and twenty tragedies as long as Macbeth. After Blake's death, his injudicious friend Tatham destroyed some hundred volumes of unpublished manuscripts. Despite his undaunted energy and his creative power, he never would have accomplished all this single-handed. His wife, the daughter of a market gardener, a girl who could neither read nor write when he married her, learned to aid him in preparing his books and to color them in a manner that rivalled Blake's own work. She believed in her husband's mission; to quote Tatham's grandiloquent period, she was "the buttress of his hopes, the stay to his thoughts, the admirer of his genius, the companion of his solitude and the solace of his days."¹

Blake lived in his imagination. "To me this world is all one continued vision of fancy or imagination," he wrote, and throughout his life visions appeared to him.² He conversed hourly and daily with his dead brother, he wrote Hayley, and it was his spirit who taught Blake to prepare his plates and print his books. He was "under the direction of messengers from heaven, daily and nightly"; he wrote his *Milton* "from immediate dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without premeditation, and even against my will."³ His mind was filled with books and pictures which he had written in eternity before his mortal life, "and those works are the delight and study of the archangels." Such sentences might imply mental derangement, but those who knew Blake best saw no sign of an unbalanced mind. After his death John Linnell wrote: "I never in all my conversations with him could for a moment feel there was the least justice in calling him in-

¹ P. 44.

² P. 62.

³ P. 115.

sane; he could always explain his paradoxes satisfactorily when he pleased, but to many he spoke so that 'hearing they might *not* hear.'"¹ His Prophetic Books, which do not concern us, are as a whole unintelligible to Blake's most devoted readers, yet even here of many a page it may be said

" what he spake, though it lacked form a little,
Was not like madness."

Blake's genius was essentially lyrical. Reason and logic were to him "spectrous fiends" to be destroyed; the real man was imagination. He wished to cast aside from poetry "the rotten rags of Memory" and "all that is not inspiration," and accordingly he wrote as no other poet had written. Much of the unequalled quality of Milton's blank verse is due to the fact that he composed it for his ear, not for his eye; Blake's lyrics have a fascination because they were written by a man who was blind to this world and who saw in its stead a new heaven and a new earth.

This is not so apparent in his earliest volume. In the *Poetical Sketches* we find that he has caught many a hint from books, which is not surprising when we remember that some of these songs were written when Blake was but fourteen and that they were published when he was seventeen. *Fair Elenor* and *Gwin, King of Norway* show that Blake knew the ballads of the *Reliques*, yet he had read them in his own fashion. *To Spring* and *To the Evening Star* have something of Collins's unrhymed *Ode to Evening*, yet they are not copies of that poem. *To the Muses*, one of the most perfect of all Blake's lyrics, has the finish, the music of Collins's finest work. When we consider that it appeared on the very eve of the romantic revival, it shows that Blake, though a seer, was no prophet:

“Whether on Ida’s shady brow,
Or in the chambers of the East,
The chambers of the sun, that now
From ancient melody have ceased;

“How have you left the ancient love
That bards of old enjoyed in you!
The languid strings do scarcely move!
The sound is forced, the notes are few!”¹

His two songs, “My silks and fine array” and “Memory, hither come,” are Elizabethan in expression and feeling, yet here we have some characteristic lines:

“I’ll pour upon the stream
Where sighing lovers dream,
And fish for fancies as they pass
Within the watery glass.”²

It is in the song “Love and harmony combine” that we see most plainly Blake’s spirit:

“Love and harmony combine,
And around our souls entwine
While thy branches mix with mine,
And our roots together join.

“Joys upon our branches sit,
Chirping loud and swinging sweet;
Like gentle streams beneath our feet
Innocence and virtue meet.”³

The *Songs of Innocence* are pure Blake. He had, says Linnell, “the simplicity and gentleness of a child,” and one

¹ J. Sampson, *The Lyrical Poems of William Blake*, Oxford, 1906, p. 19.

² P. 15.

³ P. 13.

may add, the tenderness. Love for the unfortunate and weak was a cardinal article in his faith:

“ A horse misused upon the road
Calls to Heaven for human blood.
Each outcry of the hunted hare
A fibre from the brain does tear.
He who shall hurt the little wren
Shall never be beloved by men.
Kill not the moth nor butterfly,
For the last judgment draweth nigh.”¹

With such a nature, he is not the poet, understanding the child's point of view, he is the child itself speaking with a directness of spiritual apprehension that shames our reason and touches our hearts. The poem that begins “Little Lamb, who made thee” is an excellent example of this. Stevenson writes with equal simplicity of the simple happenings in a child's life; Blake's poems are deeper and lay hold on eternity, for he saw beyond the visible:

“ For a double vision my eyes do see,
And a double vision is always with me.
With my inward eye, 'tis an old man grey,
With my outward, a thistle across my way.”²

All these qualities combine to give to his poems a touch of strangeness and wonder that seems alien to their simple forms and monosyllabic diction. Even in his *Songs of Experience*, where his spirit is troubled, he keeps this mood of wonder. In “Tiger! Tiger! burning bright” we have the most perfect example of this. After asking what hammer and what anvil could frame its fearful symmetry, he writes:

¹ P. 138. Several lines are transposed.

² P. 153.

“When the stars threw down their spears,
And watered heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?”¹

The effect of the last line, with its naïve astonishment, one never forgets. His slumber songs, among the most tender and beautiful in the language, are not without their pathos when we remember that Blake was childless—they were written for his dream children.

We find in the *Songs of Experience* his deepest lyric note. *London* is an outcry against the wrongs of modern society, but rarely does he look at his age in this fashion. He protests against the cruelty and falsehood in our natures. It is a mark of his peculiar genius that his shortest poems, eight lines, can start such far-reaching thoughts and emotions. *The Sick Rose*, *Infant Sorrow*, “I told my love,” have a significance in their direct yet subtle appeal which the grotesque and grim creatures that stalk through the prophetic books have never gained. Blake took pleasure in the fact that children had delighted in his drawings; the simplest reader may catch the meaning of his best work. Had these lyrics been widely read, Blake might have claimed the honor of restoring to English song its imaginative and spiritual heritage.

It is instructive to compare these poems with the lyrics of the neo-Celtic writers who claim Blake as one of their band. These modern poets have no such definite vision, for they live in the shadows and twilight. They lack his firm technique; their verses waver and falter where his lyrics, like arrows, fly swift to the mark. Their pale women find no place in his songs, for he writes not of love but as a French critic has phrased it, of a love for humanity.² Their note is full of pathos, but he sings of action and hope. Both the moderns and Blake lose themselves at times in the clouds,

¹ P. 58.

² P. Berger, *William Blake: Mysticism et Poésie*, Paris, 1906.

but our younger poets see the clouds from which the light is fading; Blake, the clouds that are flushed with the dawn.

V

Though we have confined our study to the English lyric, it would be pedantry to pass by Robert Burns (1759-1796); to say nothing of his genius, his effect on Wordsworth alone would justify his inclusion in a volume which does not consider Scottish verse. He stands at the end of a long line of Scottish singers; he gathers up in his writings all the dominant characteristics of the vernacular school; he inherits his vocabulary—racy and vivid—his metres, and his very subjects. Accordingly we can not fully appreciate Burns until we perceive what he took from his predecessors and how he transformed what he took, precisely as it is impossible to understand Shakespeare's art without a knowledge of his contemporaries and of what he learned from them.

Scottish vernacular literature is remarkable for its patriotism, its humor and its realism.¹ We have not found in the English lyric that outspoken expression of nationality, that pride in birth and tradition that has always marked the Scottish writers. When our English lyrists turned eagerly to foreign models, Scottish poets found their inspiration more often at home, and such an exception as Drummond of Hawthornden who pillaged French and Italian poetry in no way disproves this. The very years when Chaucer, with all his English spirit, was utilizing French *fabliaux* or Boccaccio's *Griselda*, John Barbour was writing his *Bruce*, the story of Scotland's hero, and writing it with such feeling that centuries after it stirred the imagination of Walter Scott and had its share in determining his career. Given Burns's familiarity with the vernacular poetry and given his imitative spirit, it was almost predestined that "Scots

¹ See T. F. Henderson, *Scottish Vernacular Literature*, London, 1900.

wha hae wi' Wallace bled," or some lyric as ardent in its patriotism should come from his lips.

We have seen but little humor in the English lyric. The gaiety of Suckling, the wit of Prior, the pleasantry of Cowper are far removed from the rollicking spirit of the songs that pleased the

"hairum-scairum, ram-stam boys,
The rattling squad."

The humor of Scottish poetry is that of the country wedding, the village fair, the rustic dance, the tavern song; a humor that is always vigorous, often coarse because it is close to the soil. It is the literature of high spirits seeking outlet; it is always hearty and spontaneous and if at times it is pushed too far, yet it is saner than much that has passed for humor in the writings of some poets we have considered.

This patriotism and humor is expressed in a thoroughly realistic manner; there is little idealizing—though to every lover a mistress is all beauty—and there is small searching for fine phrases or rare similes in this poetry. The men and women of these songs are the peasants at the plow, and the lasses in the fields, "yonder girl that fords the burn." These poets who sing "the loves, the ways of simple swains," strive to show life as they see it and feel it; they employ a realistic method that reminds one of the pictures of Terbourg or Teniers, except that the Dutch painters give us the interiors of homes and taverns while the Scottish lyrists show us their men and women in the corn rigs or under the stars. When Zola mistakenly argued that the Latin races had introduced realism into literature, he forgot, among other matters, Scottish poetry.

It is to our poet's honor that he did not seek to depart from the traditions of the vernacular. From boyhood he had been an eager reader of verse and it was impossible that he should always avoid what he considered the grand manner.

We have many traces of cold and lifeless imitation, many lapses into false diction ("wild poetic rage," he called it). He even wrote a poor sonnet and a Pindaric ode, yet this is a small part of his work and his own good sense and his Scottish audience saved him from becoming a feeble follower of poets with whom he had little in common. Henley has shown that Burns often needed a suggestion, a line or a phrase, to begin his song and he found these hints not in "Thomson's Landscape glow" or "Shenstone's art," but in the verses of many forgotten Scottish singers. "O my Luve's like a red, red rose" is a good example of this. Cinthio's story of a brutal murder caught Shakespeare's eye and, re-fashioned so that its own author would not know it, a clumsily told tale becomes *Othello*. Burns makes a flawless lyric out of these rude verses:

" Her cheeks are like the roses
That blossom fresh in June,
O, she's like a new-strung instrument
That's newly put in tune."

" The seas they shall run dry,
And rocks melt into sands;
Then I'll love you still, my dear,
When all those things are done."

" Fare you well, my own true love,
And fare you well for a while,
And I will be sure to return back again,
If I go ten thousand mile."¹

Each of these three stanzas represents a different song; the poet's instinct told him what to leave and what to change for all through his lyrics he showed a remarkable intuition

¹ W. E. Henley and T. F. Henderson, *The Poetry of Robert Burns*, Edinburgh, 1896, vol. III, p. 402. Cf. Henley's splendid essay, vol. IV, pp. 322-332.

for the best. Thus in his work lives on the finest emotion, the inspired phrase of many a rustic singer, and his songs move us because we hear in them not only Burns but other poets who have hoped and sorrowed. These country songs, these Jacobite relics, were common property; Ramsay knew them and collected many, but it was Burns who saw in them his opportunity, as every artist sees in the trivial and commonplace the material for his greatest work.

It must not be presumed that Burns was content merely to refine the work of others. What he learned from Scottish song is incalculable—he was no Chatterton or Blake, creating his own world—yet a man of his force and fearlessness has always his own message. The most impressive quality in his songs is the energy, the life that infuses them. Too many of our lyrists have written to please a patron or a mistress; Burns wrote to please himself. If there had been no printing press, he still would have rhymed “for fun,” to use his own phrase; had there been no peasants, no Edinburgh society to applaud him, he still would have taught

“the lanely heights an’ howes
My rustic sang.”

Burns knew precisely what he wished to accomplish:

“Gie me ae spark o’ Nature’s fire,
That’s a’ the learning I desire;
Then, tho’ I drudge thro’ dub an’ mire
At pleugh or cart,
My Muse, tho’ hamely in attire,
May touch the heart.”¹

He threw himself into life; even in his conversation, said one who knew him, he carried everything before him. His one aim was to express not fancies, or sentiments, or dreams, but the emotions of a full-blooded man. It was this faculty of

¹ *Epistle to J. Lapraik*, Henley and Henderson, *Burns*, vol. I, p. 158.

gaining from the very moment all that it has to offer, this concentration of feeling, that gives his poems their power. If we contrast his *To a Daisy* or *To a Fieldmouse* with Vaughan's lines to a flower or to the bird blown in his window we see how much closer Burns is to life, though Vaughan was a nature lover. This intensity of feeling was aided by the fact that Burns did not write for the eye but for the ear; his songs were really sung and the old melodies to which he composed them lent some of their feeling to his words.

To English readers, the Scottish dialect is as poetic as Milton's latinized diction, but his vocabulary was the simple one of the Scotch peasant. He shared with Villon the gift of drawing his pictures firmly and sharply; we have had many personifications that leave no image on the memory, but in a phrase, Burns outdoes a whole Pindaric ode:

"See, crazy, weary, joyless Eild,
Wi' wrinkled face,
Comes hostin, hirplin owre the field,
Wi' creepin pace."¹

What a vivid picture of old age. In his nature descriptions, we have whole landscapes in a pair of verses. It is interesting to see him meet Shakespeare on his own ground and equal in his stanza on the lark, the exquisite picture in the song from *Cymbeline*.

To express, then, the deepest feelings in the simplest manner was Burns's gift. There are many aspects of thought and emotion which he did not consider. If we accept Shelley's simile of life—a dome of many colored glass staining the radiance of eternity—the richer and subtler colors were not for Burns. "Ae fond kiss" or "Of a' the airts" are as clear as the sunlight itself and beside such frank expression much of our modern song seems fantastically over-

¹ Vol. I, p. 63, *Epistle to James Smith*.

wrought and curiously subtle. Not to Wordsworth alone has Burns revealed that

“Verse may build a princely throne
On humble truth.”¹

VI

The death of Burns brings us within two years of the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*; yet before we come to that epoch-making work, we must consider one more precursor of the romantic movement. William Lisle Bowles (1762-1850), a graduate of Oxford, a canon of Salisbury, wrote, among other poems, thirty sonnets. Many of them are descriptions of places which he visited in a vain attempt to forget the death of his betrothed. They are accordingly filled with a grief which, as his nature was a mild one, diffuses itself in a plaintive melancholy, not unlike the mood of the Miltonic group. At times Bowles shows their influence and takes many a phrase from Milton himself. We see the ocean stilled at evening, gray battlements, forsaken towers; we wander beside sequestered streams musing on happier days; we hear the mournful sound of bells across the water. The descriptions are graceful, the thought is simply expressed, and if beside the elegiac verses of Shelley and Byron (who detested Bowles and dubbed him the “Maudlin Prince of mournful sonneteers”) the emotional force appears weak, it is never insincere and we know that he weeps “for her who in the cold grave lies.” The sonnet beginning “O Time! who know’st a lenient hand to lay,” sums up all his qualities.

The influence of Bowles on Coleridge and Wordsworth was a marked one.² Coleridge, in his enthusiasm, made forty

¹ *At the Grave of Burns.*

² See T. E. Casson, *Bowles*, in *Eighteenth Century Literature*, Oxford, 1909.

copies of twenty of the sonnets and presented them to his friends; amid other eulogies he has called Bowles "the most tender, and with the exception of Burns, the only always natural poet in our language." The story of Wordsworth reading the sonnets through on Westminster Bridge, forgetful of the noise of the passers, is a well-known one and there are many descriptions in them that plainly attracted him:

"As one who, long by wasting sickness worn,
Weary has watched the lingering night, and heard
Heartless the carol of the matin bird
Salute his lonely porch, now first at morn
Goes forth, leaving his melancholy bed;
He the green slope and level meadow views,
Delightful bathed with slow-ascending dew;
Or marks the clouds, that o'er the mountain's head
In varying forms fantastic wander white."¹

To express one's grief unaffectedly, to find in nature not only beauty but consolation, these were the chief tenets of this poet's creed. Like many a pathfinder, he is now forgotten, yet with others considered in this chapter, he led the way for the newer and greater race of singers.

¹ W. L. Bowles, *Sonnets and other Poems*, seventh edition, London, 1800, p. 25.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE LYRIC OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

PART ONE

I

The *Lyrical Ballads* appeared in 1798, making that year forever memorable in literary history. To this volume Coleridge (1772-1834) contributed the *Ancient Mariner* and three other pieces; of the remaining nineteen poems by Wordsworth (1770-1850), *Tintern Abbey*, the last one in the book, is at once the most significant and the most beautiful. As Wordsworth's share, then, in this first fruit of the modern Renaissance was the greater, we shall consider him before Coleridge.

Although Wordsworth's productivity covered a long period of years, the distinctive qualities of his work are all to be found in the *Ballads*. We see at once his preference for a simple and unadorned diction; his insistence upon the significance and the grandeur of the most elementary feelings; his passion for the beauty of nature and his realization of its power over man's mind and soul. Though his spirit is here, the book does not show his technique at its best; it contains neither ode nor sonnet and this omission of the formal lyric is significant. The genius of Wordsworth was not lyrical; he has not left us a single song, for though lyrical feeling surges through his verse, the gift of Burns was denied to him.

This seems remarkable, for not only was Wordsworth of a deeply emotional nature, but he gave his emotions free play; his finest poems are suffused with a feeling so poignant

that they subdue us instantly to the poet's mood. He was ever given to splendid enthusiasm. As a young graduate from Cambridge, studying in France at the outbreak of the Revolution, he determined to place himself at the head of the Girondist party; his life was saved because his friends in alarm summoned him back to England. Such an episode seems to come from the biography of Shelley. Assured that he had a message for the world, he abandoned everything to study it and to tell it. Living frugally, far from the busy hum of men, like Blake he knew what it meant to scorn delights and live laborious days; surely no one had ever a better right to extol plain living and high thinking. He was a deeper mystic than Blake, for the poet-artist often felt himself but the instrument of the spirit world and his vision passed beyond poetic representation; Wordsworth never lost the power of telling what he saw and felt so that all might understand the purport if not the depth of his meaning. From such a nature, emotional, idealistic, we expect a veritable flood of song. We have said that this Renaissance of poetry was distinguished by a renewal of the lyric and in considering Wordsworth's verse, we must seek to ascertain why it lacked the song quality.

One reason for this is that he had a well-considered, and for his day, a revolutionary theory of poetry to expound; if he was not a teacher, he said, then he was nothing. Now the didactic spirit is inimical to song. The Psalms, the grandest collection of lyrics in ancient literature, certainly are at times didactic; a modern writer has declared that poets learn in suffering what they *teach* in song. However, the first concern of Psalmist and modern lyricist alike is the expression of emotion and we read into their songs the lesson. With Wordsworth the message too often was first in his mind, and while this may or may not lower the emotional tone, it disturbs and even destroys song. We see a good illustration of this in one of his best-known poems:

" My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!"

Here is a pure lyric; the lines sing themselves, but when we come to the three concluding verses that give the significance to the emotion, the thought is expressed in such a manner that the song quality instantly vanishes:

" The child is father of the man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety."

Another poem, equally familiar, has a lyric opening:

" I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,"

but it has too much description, the style is too compact for a song. It forms a delightful contrast with Herrick's *To Daffodils*, which is more delicate and more artful in its lament for fading beauty. Reading these poems side by side we see how much more significant even a flower has become to the modern poet.

If Wordsworth's desire to comment upon his emotions and to explain his thoughts restrains him from song, equally so does his fundamental conception of poetry, which is, he informs us, "emotion recollected in tranquillity." The song springs at once from the occasion; but this burst of feeling Wordsworth would restrain to ponder and reflect upon. If it be not sacrilege to enlarge upon his definition, his poetry at least is not only emotion recollected in tranquillity but it produces tranquil feelings and calm thoughts—and this is not the lyric mood, though all lyrics do not spring from storm and stress. Unlike his Highland reaper, Wordsworth

does not sing of old, unhappy, far-off things, but of the peace of nature and her restoring power. Song finds such a theme too vast for it.

Love is the most common of lyric themes; there is remarkably little love poetry in his many poems. Of all his sonnets, "Why art thou silent" is the only one that approaches the mood of the Elizabethans, and this was written, he said, without the least reference to any individual and merely to show that he could write "in a strain poets have been fond of." The Lucy poems, however, contain one memorable lyric, a dirge that expresses in eight lines the utter desolation wrought by death. "A slumber did my spirit steal" goes as deep as the plummet of grief ever sounded, for the poet realizes that what he once loved is now a dull clod, no better than the stone or tree. The anguish of despair does not burst forth as it does in the elegies of Byron or Shelley, for in the very whirlwind of Wordsworth's passion there is always a temperance that gives it smoothness. We must never be deceived by his calmer manner.

The love that Wordsworth sang was not for woman but for one who never betrayed the heart that loved her. Nature was more beautiful to him than she had been to any of his predecessors because he knew her better. He found her "so lovely that the heart can not sustain her beauty"; he felt love stealing "from earth to man, from man to earth," and more than any other writer, he changed the whole attitude of his race towards the outer world. He has here a subject for verse that never grows old. Many of the emotions that have moved our lyric poets seem remote to us, or at least the manner in which they were expressed has rendered them so. Not only has Wordsworth found in the beauty and in the sustaining power of nature an enduring theme, but he has expressed it in a language and style of almost Biblical simplicity. Nature seems to take the pen from his hand, Arnold said, but the verse he selects to show

this loses its force apart from its context. Far better examples are such lines as:

“Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart:”

or

“The sea that bares her bosom to the moon;”

or

“The winds come to me from the fields of sleep,”

where every word but one is monosyllabic and where nature gives the inspiration. Taine has said that to understand Wordsworth one must empty his head of all earthly matters; on the contrary, one must come very close to the earth to see the power and truthfulness of his writing compared with which much of our modern verse seems affected, if not positively insincere.

It is by virtue of his sonnets and odes that Wordsworth is numbered among our lyric poets. It must frankly be confessed that the great majority of his sonnets are unreadable, for they are dull. Self-centered, destitute of humor (which implies a lack of self-criticism) Wordsworth could not separate the wheat from the chaff in his poetic garner; still, if we select the very best of the sonnets, they form the finest series in the language. They have nothing of Shakespeare's grace or of his idealization of human loveliness; they never approach the tone of Milton's scorching anger or the dignity of his pathos; their music has never the “weight and volume of sound” that distinguishes Rossetti's sonnets; yet this is merely saying that Wordsworth is not many sonneteers, but one. The range of the sonnets is remarkable. Our modern poets believe that they have discovered the city, but they have never equalled the sonnet composed upon Westminster Bridge; they sing of crowded streets, of poverty and shame, while Wordsworth finds in the sleeping London the peace that broods on his mountains. For political sonnets, we have the ones on Venice, on Switzer-

land, and the six written in London in 1802, filled with a patriotism that is not blind, and a stern criticism that is inspiring. For description of nature there are many masterpieces, such as "It is a beauteous evening," or the lines on the Trossachs; for pure music, "A flock of sheep that leisurely pass by," which rivals in its imagery and in its soft melody the famous picture of the cave of Sleep in the *Faerie Queene*; for feeling, expressing his dominant idea, "The world is too much with us." All these sonnets are broad in their spirit; they have the health and strength of the ocean breezes. Despite the beauty of individual lines, they owe their distinction to their content rather than to their form; many sonnets have been more cunningly wrought, but none have surpassed them in nobility of feeling.

Two of Wordsworth's odes rank among his highest achievements. The *Ode to Duty* is modelled on Gray's *Hymn to Adversity*, but the similarity of form is the only resemblance. Wordsworth's poem contains no allegorical figures, no descriptive touches, but relies entirely upon the elevation of its thought expressed with a restraint that befits the subject:

"Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;

And the most ancient heavens, through Thee, are fresh and strong."

It is fortunate that the *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, the justification of the whole pseudo-Pindaric school, is so familiar that it needs little comment. Wordsworth has written odes as uninspired as Cowley's; a mere glance at "Hail, orient Conqueror of gloomy night," or at the *Ode on the Power of Sound* will show it. Here, with a subject that thrilled him, he became what he wished to be, the prophet, the bard. The ode has not the richness of Spenser's verse, nor has its music the cumulative effect of *Lycidas*, in which there are ever-advancing waves of melody; in at least one

stanza, as Professor Saintsbury points out, the metre is thoroughly inadequate, but we forget this in the effect of the poem as a whole. Again and again the feeling and thought concentrate in verse so simple and yet so poignant, that we may call this the greatest ode in the language. If such praise seems uncritical, what is to be placed above this poem?

Coleridge (1772-1834), poet, philosopher, and critic, turned to prose from verse in which he had shown a genius unmatched and even unapproached. No poet before or after him has written with such imagination and thought so vitally united. At times his criticism appears positively inspired, yet other writers might have brought as keen an insight to the study of Shakespeare or have analyzed with equal clearness the qualities of Wordsworth's style; we feel in reading *Christabel* or *Dejection* that we are listening to a voice whose melodies none can repeat. When a great poet abandons his art, nothing can compensate for the loss. An act of *Faust* outweighs all the pages of *Wilhelm Meister*.

Coleridge has three distinct lyric moods; we see them in *The Ancient Mariner*, *Kubla Khan*, and the *Odes*. *The Ancient Mariner*, the first poem in the *Lyrical Ballads*, is as much a lyric as a tale. We did not discuss the early ballads because they were little epics; the ballad makers described the deeds of men and women in an impersonal manner, with little censure or praise. An old woman, sheltered for seven years by the outlaw, William of Cloudesly, rises up from his hearth to sell his life for a scarlet gown; the ballad maker neither comments upon her villainy nor laments the ingratitude of mankind. Often the ballad singers stand far off from the world they depict:

“O lang, lang may their ladies sit,
Wi’ their fans into their hand,
Or eir they see Sir Patrick Spens
Cum sailing to the land!”

In the *Ancient Mariner*, the mystery and wonder of the story has one purpose; to thrill us with the sufferings of a man

“ Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea!”

Amid all the horrors of that strange voyage, we never forget him, for he it is and not the poet who speaks to us, and again and again the narrative pauses and we hear his song of agony. We must compare with this poem the ballad of Thomas the Rhymer if we would understand the intensity of the modern imagination and feeling; how far removed are the *ferlies* he sees from the fearful sights which but recounted stun the wedding guest! The art of the verse, apparently so simply written, the effect of the repetitions, the sudden climaxes, show a complete mastery of technique; no one had ever suspected that such possibilities lay concealed in this measure. What is perhaps the most difficult feat of all, Coleridge has perfectly accomplished. He has brought the terror and shudder of romance to a story told as though it were an adventure in the Spanish main; that is, the tale never fades away into the shadows though the mystery is always before us. It is as though a spirit passed before us taking the form of man, and yet we knew it to be a ghostly visitant. Gilpin Horner, the goblin page of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, has nothing of the other world about him; this is a dream that has all the sharp outline of reality, and yet we know it is a dream.

Kubla Khan is the finest example in our literature of what Herrick has called the magic incantation of verse. The scenery in the *Lotos-Eaters* is carefully designed; in this poem the “sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice” rises like an exhalation at the sound of the music that is in every word. It is not enough to say that the poem is pure melody, for from its modulations comes a more definite mood than our modern poets of the Celtic twilight can evoke with all their

tone pictures. The quiet opening; the more rapid movement of the lines in which is depicted the mighty fountain bursting from the earth; the mystery of the far-off voices prophesying war; the vision of the Abyssinian maid; the burst of ecstasy with which the poem closes, show Coleridge more the magician here than in the *Ancient Mariner*. How few poems there are that leave us in this mood of wonder, thrilled with the rapture of a vision which leaves the imagination untouched with sadness. In Shelley's poems we have an ecstasy of feeling but inevitably accompanied with despondency and even despair.

Before we come to the *Odes*, two short lyrics deserve consideration. The song from *Zapolya*,

"A sunny shaft did I behold,
From sky to earth it slanted:
And poised therein a bird so bold—
Sweet bird, thou wert enchanted!"

is musical and full of color; his lament, *Work without Hope*, whose fourteen lines another poet would have cast in the sonnet form, is more impressive than the passionately expressed laments of our later romanticists. They express some mood or sorrow of the moment; here we have the realization of the futility of a man's whole life:

"With lips unbrightened, wreathless brow, I stroll:
And would you learn the spells that drowse my soul?
Work without Hope draws nectar in a sieve,
And Hope without an object cannot live."

Of the three *Odes*, the two political ones, *On the Departing Year* and *To France*, must yield to *Dejection*. The first two, romantic in feeling, have something of the eighteenth century classic style about them; their personifications—Avarice, Destruction, Ambition—are masks rather than the figurative embodiment of the poet's thought. The *Ode to*

France is the finer one, for its opening strophe is one of Coleridge's best achievements. The spirit of these lines is as emotional as Shelley's, yet where his music comes with a burst, here the "dark inwoven harmonies" strike the ear more gradually. We have spoken of the rhetoric which disfigures Pindaric odes as a class; here is an apostrophe to nature in which every line rings with sincerity. There is no better way of distinguishing in any ode feigned emotion from the genuine expression of deeply wrought feeling than reading aloud this stanza and then turning to Cowley's Pindarics.

The ode *Dejection* deals not with the tragedy of the French Revolution, but with the tragedy in the poet's mind, and though he writes but of himself, this poem seems broader in spirit than his others. The thought, we may even say the philosophy, of the ode has neither repressed the feeling nor the poet's delight in picturing the clouds and the moon in lines which rival the observation and the beauty of phrase of Wordsworth at his best:

"All this long eve, so balmy and serene,
Have I been gazing on the western sky,
And its peculiar tint of yellow green:
And still I gaze—and with how blank an eye!
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
That give away their motion to the stars;
Those stars, that glide behind them or between,
Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen:
Yon crescent moon, as fixed as if it grew
In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue;
I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!"

This is the rare quality of Coleridge's poetry: the purely intellectual element in his verse is fused naturally with his most emotional and sensuous writing. If we compare this

ode with Shelley's expression of dejection, we shall see that Coleridge analyzes his mood, he "looks before and after," while Shelley, with all his richness of imagery, but tries to explain his feeling at one given moment of time. In Wordsworth's thought the conclusion of the whole matter seems not sought out but intuitively perceived, directly apprehended; in Coleridge's poems, we see the mind at work, and it is the mind of a mystic and thinker, a dreamer and an observer.

II

Lord Byron (1788-1824), the greatest personal force in English letters since Dean Swift, has left many lyrics of self-revelation, the most frank and intimate poems that had hitherto seen the light, for they disclosed moods that are not often shown the world. In them we find him from very boyhood shy, sensitive, deeply emotional, longing for appreciation and sympathy. Without glossing over in his career much that was unworthy, much that was wrong, it may at least be said that many of his misfortunes came from Fate rather than from his own acts. His unhappy love for Mary Chaworth (she married when Byron was but seventeen!) embittered his whole life, as *The Dream* and many other poems, unmistakable in their sincerity, attest. He was unhappy in a proud and violent mother who treated him with alternate affection and cruelty; in a wife who so little understood him that she actually inquired when he would give up his bad habit of writing verses. He proclaimed with bravado his contempt for society, yet he desired homage; he wrote that he would willingly forget man, yet he longed for fame. His last weeks in Greece were filled with discouragements and disillusionment as he saw the petty jealousies and the mercenary aims of the race for which he had such hopes. Even

a soldier's death, which he sought, was denied to him. As Byron is the least impersonal of poets, his life is pictured with such fidelity in his verse (for we can brush aside the rhetoric) that in reading the lyrics there is a temptation to regard them not as works of art but as psychological documents, as though they were so many letters in a novel written by a greater Richardson, laying bare the mind and heart of a genius.

There is another aspect of these lyrics that holds our attention; there is a certain evolution of thought and emotion that culminates in Byron. The pensive elegies of the Miltonic school; the sentimentalism of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*; the carefully calculated sorrows and even agonies of Richardson's *Clarissa Harlowe*, are signs of what we may call the revival of pity. Rousseau, sinister influence, in his *Nouvelle Héloïse* shows the deepening of this emotion and its transformation into uncontrolled passion; Goethe, in his *Werther*, shows pity transformed to bitterness and despair. Then came the French Revolution and its failure. France with its Bourbon king, England with Castlereagh, settled back in the old established ways; in the reaction, high hopes were lost, ideals of a regenerated society were shattered, and free thought was crushed by the orthodoxy of church and state. Pity changed to anger; the love of humanity to a contempt for society; enthusiasm to scorn. Carlyle has defined *Weltschmerz* as passion incapable of action, and this feeling of disappointment, of frustrated hopes, this *Weltschmerz*, Byron expressed as did no other poet. If there is danger of treating his lyrics as personal biography, there is equal danger of regarding them as social documents, of seeing in them the spirit of the age. Burns was in revolt against the authority of the church in a country parish; Byron was a revolutionist to whom Europe listened, and still on the Continent he is regarded as the greatest of modern English poets.

Remembering then Byron's life and the temper of the times, we read his lyrics and find in them two moods. The first is his expression of the *tædium vitæ*; we see writ large his unhappiness, his discontent with life:

“ Count o'er the joys thine hours have seen,
Count o'er thy days from anguish free,
And know, whatever thou hast been,
'Tis something better not to be.”¹

We hear the voice of Hamlet:

“ It is that weariness which springs
From all I meet, or hear, or see:
To me no pleasure Beauty brings,
Thine eyes have scarce a charm for me.”²

Insisting upon his own wretchedness, there is a tendency to drop from the tragic to the purely melodramatic, as in the close of his *Epistle to a Friend*, where he foretells that he may become one

“ whom love nor pity sways,
Nor hope of fame, nor good men's praise;
One, who in stern ambition's pride,
Perchance not blood shall turn aside;
One ranked in some recording page
With the worst anarchs of the age.”³

It is easy to see that this is mere rhetoric, written to convince the reader and not to express an emotion the poet is unable to restrain. But this mood of sadness is again and again expressed with sincerity as in his *Stanzas to Augusta*, or in his song, “There's not a joy the world can give.” No lyric

¹ *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron*, Oxford, 1909, p. 63, *Euthanasia*.

² P. 188.

³ P. 61.

rings truer than his very last one, written on his thirty-sixth birthday, in which he tells us

“ My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone!”¹

It is hardly necessary to point out that Byron's mood is not ours, even in moments of discouragement; our depression comes not because the world is barren but because it offers so much that we can not grasp it. We do not wish for “the dreamless sleep that lulls the dead,” for we would prolong our lives forever; we mourn not the length of the weary day but that the very years are all too short and fly too quickly. In our darkest moments we cry, with Milton's Belial:

“ For who would lose,
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,
Those thoughts that wander through eternity.”

We are most in sympathy with Byron's despairing mood when he writes of death. His elegies on Thyrza, “One struggle more, and I am free,” or the finer “And thou art dead, as young and fair,” have the inward touch that makes the eighteenth century poems of the grave, with their grief for the world at large, with their moralizing, seem but faint echoes of sorrow.

The other mood of Byron is the quieter one in which he sings of beauty. Knowing the magnificent descriptive passages of *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*, we are surprised that this mood does not enter more into his lyrics. They are indeed singularly unadorned with picturesque phrases, with those touches that call before us the beauty of art or nature. Two songs, however, beautiful both in their descriptions and in their music, represent this side of his work. “She walks in

¹ *On this Day I complete my Thirty-sixth Year*, p. 110.

beauty like the night" anticipates the art and melody of Tennyson; "There be none of Beauty's daughters" has a rarer music and, from the æsthetic standpoint, is his best lyric.

The interest, then, in Byron's lyrics lies in their direct expression of feeling, not in their thought or in their technique. (The great object in life, said Byron, is sensation, and this at once expresses the attraction and the defect of his work.) There is no emotion recollected in tranquillity here; he writes on the spot and a great deal of his work is pure and simple improvisation. The sister art which Byron most admired was music; even when in Italy he showed himself singularly insensible to sculpture and painting, and yet he wrote so rapidly that he was often careless of the melody of his verse. He had, says Swinburne, "a feeble and faulty sense of metre; no poet of equal or inferior rank ever had so bad an ear. His smoother cadences are often vulgar and facile; his fresher notes are often incomplete and inharmonious." William Morris observes that he had no original measures. At least we may urge that Byron shows an advance over Wordsworth in rhymed measure; he has a fairly wide range from the anapests of "The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold," to the restraint, unusual for him, of "When we two parted." Many of his Spenserian stanzas do indeed falter; his odes on Waterloo and on Napoleon have neither the breadth of expression nor the orchestral music the *genre* demands, yet to deny to Byron the gift of melody is to read him with deaf ears.

In our opening chapter we stated that in purely descriptive poems we come upon lyrical passages, and this is especially true of Byron's work. How much of *Childe Harold* and even *Don Juan* is lyrical. In reading the famous apostrophe to the ocean; the lines on solitude; the verses on Time, the beautifier of the dead; we can understand why Byron captivated his age. He needed a large canvas for

his word pictures; it took him some time to work up to his climaxes and accordingly song pure and simple was not his best gift. One who has read only the lyrics has not felt the real Byron; indeed his greatest mood of all—his mockery and scorn—is seen at its best in *Don Juan*.

It seems strange that such a mighty personality could ever become obscured, yet the vogue of Byron waned with the coming of Tennyson and Browning. We have passed from his spell and may, therefore, estimate him more fairly than did his contemporaries. If we demand higher art and a more just and hopeful attitude towards life, we still should feel the power of his inspiration. An age that depreciates Byron has become conventional and artificial.

(Of all English poets, Shelley (1792-1822) is the most lyrical. As Charlotte Brontë disclosed her emotional personality in her novels, so he found in song his most perfect method of self-expression. In by far the greater number of his poems (always excepting the *Cenci*, written with a remarkable restraint and a close adherence to the story) we feel only the subjective moods and the compelling emotions that determined the poet's life.

The character of Shelley is not a difficult one to understand, especially with the aid given us by the biographies and letters of those who knew and appreciated him. (There were no great changes in his nature; he was consistent to his own ideals; and in reading his verse we find in it, as in Byron's poetry, two predominating moods. The first, in which he expresses his ideals for humanity and his hopes for the regeneration of the world, we may call his social mood; the second is a purely personal mood of joy or sorrow, and generally sadness prevails.) The first mood enters but rarely into his shorter lyrics—as in *Ozymandias*—or the concluding song in *Hellas*, or the sonnet to Wordsworth—yet we must consider it; certainly it deepened the tone of even his briefest songs such as "Rough wind that moanest loud."

Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley have expressed in their lyrics their views on society. The Elizabethan and Caroline singers were generally self-centered and wrote in the spirit of "My mind to me a kingdom is"; the modern lyrist has a wider vision. Byron's views are the least valuable, for they are purely negative: the world is vanity; it is better not to be; if you must live, seek the pathless wood and the solitary shore to escape from your fellows; love the ocean because it bears no trace of man. Wordsworth, on the other hand, is constructive. He accepts the social order but he would improve upon it; we are too worldly; we must live more simply; we are worse than pagans in our blindness to nature; we must let her refine and elevate us. Shelley did not accept the position of either poet. He wished to sweep away entirely the present social scheme—all rulers and priests, all laws and customs—and then to build upon the wrecks of faiths and empires a new world. He had, to use his own words, a "passion for reforming the world"; he would have rejoiced in the prospect of a second deluge.)

His watchword was accordingly Liberty, and he was in perpetual revolt against every restraint. At nineteen he is expelled from Oxford for publishing a tract, "The Necessity of Atheism," his first public attack on the church. This very year he elopes with Harriet Westbrook, a girl of sixteen, chiefly because her father, he writes, "persecuted her in a most horrible manner by compelling her to go to school," and he had urged her "to resist such stupendous and galling tyranny." In Ireland with Harriet he distributes pamphlets and books urging a revolt against English rule. The uprisings in Naples and Spain call from him his two fiery odes. In his last months at Pisa, deeply moved by the story of Emilia Viviani, an Italian girl confined against her will in a convent, he writes his *Epipsychidion*. He hears of the Greek struggle for independence and writes *Hellas*. The subject of the Cenci attracts him, partly because it is the

revolt against a father's tyranny and crime. [*Prometheus Unbound*, the most wonderful piece of sustained lyric writing in the language, is the tale of the final emancipation of humanity by the resistance of the human will to divine oppression. Surely he is the very apostle of Freedom.

When we search closely for Shelley's meaning of liberty we find it to be a vague ideal. He had no well-considered plan for either a new republic or a new faith; he simply wished freedom from every restraint of government and religion, having an implicit faith in the power of the untrammelled mind and soul to create a new Paradise. Granted that our civilization has much that is base and wrong, that every society has its plague spots which it complacently forgets, yet from the hard lessons of the centuries we have won some truths that are not to be cast lightly aside. We can not dismiss in a mood of unseeing exaltation all that it has cost humanity to win. The very nature Shelley loved so, the very sea of which he has written more instinctively than any other poet, is not free. Meredith is nearer our thought when he made Satan, viewing the stars, perceive that

"Around the ancient track marched, rank on rank,
The army of unalterable law."

Accordingly, in his longer poems his social mood, as an American critic has well put it, is a "kind of elusive yet rapturous emanation of hope devoid of specific content." The *Ode to Liberty*, its finest expression, is to Swinburne the greatest English ode. It has the fire and glow of imagination, the brilliant phrase, the impetuous movement that befits it, yet does not give us, as does Wordsworth's *Intimations of Immortality*, what Milton has finely called the "sober certainty of waking bliss." Shelley is an enchanter rather than a seer.

It need hardly be said that his ideal of freedom was sure to bring despondency for it was an impossible one. The

world did not listen to his call and if he had been untroubled by more intimate griefs, the failure of his social theories would have bruised if not crushed his spirit. But in his own life he was constantly waking from his dream to the bitterness of disillusionment; no verse comes closer to his experience than his own "I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed." Idealizing women, his "Portias" become "Black Demons"; he finds the heroine of his *Epipsychidion* to be not Juno but a cloud; even Mary Godwin did not wholly understand him, and so through his shorter lyrics runs the strain of dejection. His nature was singularly pure; he was all fire and air, and one must distinguish between the dejection of Byron who felt the "fullness of satiety" and the disappointment of this idealist, for the men were at the opposite poles of experience and emotion. And if we turn from Shelley's life to his art, he felt the lack of appreciation and even the hostility shown towards his poetry. "Nothing," he wrote Peacock, a year before his death, "is more difficult and unwelcome than to write without a confidence of finding readers," and at his death, Stopford Brooke doubts whether fifty people in England knew and appreciated his work. Medwin tells us in his *Life of Shelley* that he read in manuscript the *Ode to Liberty*, *The Sensitive Plant*, and many other lyrics, expressing admiration for them. "He was surprised at my enthusiasm, and said to me—'I am disgusted with writing, and were it not for an irresistible impulse that predominates my better reason, should discontinue so doing.' On such occasions he fell into a despondent mood, most distressing to witness, was affected with a prostration of spirits that bent him to the earth, a melancholy too sacred to notice, and which it would have been a vain attempt to dissipate."

By far the greater number of his lyrics express this sadness:

"Rarely, rarely comest thou,
Spirit of delight."

"How am I changed! my hopes were once like fire"; "The flower that smiles to-day, To-morrow dies"; "Far, far away, O ye, Halcyons of Memory," are typical poems. The poet sings his melancholy, making no attempt to discover why

" Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight."

Where so much is perfect expression, it is hard to choose, but perhaps the *Stanzas written in Dejection near Naples* are the most beautiful rendering of this mood. Nature brings no peace to him, as she did to Wordsworth. The bright skies, blue isles, and snowy mountains but remind him that he has neither hope nor health, "nor peace within, nor calm around." It is the same situation in his other lyrics; the wind "moans for the world's wrong"; the moon is a lady "sick and pale"; even the happy notes of the lark remind the poet that his own song can not make the world listen.

Love brings to him the bitterest disappointments; "Send the stars light, but send not love to me," is his prayer.

" I would not be a king—enough
Of woe it is to love;"

he sings, and the thought of many poems is compressed in the lyric "When the lamp is shattered."¹ [It would seem that he suffers from the very intensity of his emotion; he is in a state of ecstasy or in the inevitable reaction which brings despair. He laments that "the gentle visitations of calm thought" do not stay; it is certainly significant that he employs frequently the word "intense," and it is this intensity of feeling that gives the exotic air to the *Indian Serenade* (which Poe was one of the first to praise) or to the less familiar fragment:

¹ T. Hutchinson, *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Oxford, 1909, pp. 642, 661.

" I faint, I perish with my love! I grow
 Frail as a cloud whose [splendours] pale
 Under the evening's ever-changing glow;
 I die like mist upon the gale,
 And like a wave under the calm I fail."¹

or to his entreaty for music:

" I pant for the music which is divine,
 My heart in its thirst is a dying flower;
 Pour forth the sound like enchanted wine,
 Loosen the notes in a silver shower;
 Like a herbless plain, for the gentle rain,
 I gasp, I faint, till they wake again."²

This extreme emotion has kept Shelley from such popularity as Burns enjoys; "Ae fond kiss and then we sever" is closer to the earth. Shelley is indeed the passive instrument of his emotions; he is carried away by his feelings; he is filled with a divine madness. While much of Byron's verse was improvisation, Shelley's seems the inspiration of the very Muse herself, so strongly does his poetry move us. The one artistic fault in his writing is that at times he can not control either his imagination or his feeling; Shakespeare in the tempest of his greatest tragedies could ride the whirlwind and direct the storm.

● It is in his nature lyrics—*The Cloud*, *The Skylark*, *The Ode to the West Wind*—that Shelley has won his greatest popularity. The most ethereal of our poets, he loves to write of the heavens, of light in all its forms, of the flowers. A critic has remarked that poets usually illustrate the spiritual by the material (as Verlaine in his "Ton âme est un paysage choisi") but Shelley makes nature ghostly; it is a spirit that he seeks behind the cloud and the rain. The *Skylark* illustrates aptly the points we have discussed; the

¹P. 653.

²P. 651.

poet's spirit pours itself out in stanza after stanza all illustrating one idea: the bird is likened to a poet, a maiden in her bower, a glow worm, a rose. We prefer the *Ode to the West Wind* to all his lyrics. No other poem better discloses his passive imagination, his desire to be played upon and stimulated, and though his melancholy appears here also, the song ends in an unusually hopeful strain. Exquisite in its imagery—it is here that we find that immortal line, "Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air"—emotional and yet restrained to an unusual degree, this is one of the treasures of English literature.

(We have said little of Shelley's style, the most glowing, the most sensuous we have yet found. He is an artist, a beauty worshipper, fascinated by color and form.) Many of his lyrics deal neither with nature nor with love: "On a poet's lips I slept," the Echo songs, and Asia's "My soul is an enchanted boat," all from *Prometheus*, show the art lyric at its highest development.) If we wish to measure the change that has come over the lyric, we should read side by side the *Ode to Evening* by Collins and Shelley's *To Night*. (Much as we find to admire in the earlier poem, we perceive that Shelley's lyric is more suggestive, more lovely in its descriptions, and more musical.)

This brings us to our final consideration—Shelley's metre. He has expressed in many a line his love for music and his verse forms offer a wealth of melody. Had the content of his poetry been negligible, we should still read it for the music; he said with truth:

"I have unlocked the golden melodies
Of the deep soul."

Rarely does he echo strains we have heard before; he leaves the well-worn measures for a music of his own; even from the Spenserian stanza he gains a new effect. He has not achieved excellence in the sonnet form—critics say that it

offered too narrow a scope for him—yet how much of melody and emotion is expressed in the eight lines of “Music, when soft voices die.” From a song, he turns with ease to the cumulative effect of *Adonais*. His melodies have never been recaptured; Tennyson, Rossetti, and Swinburne have each a different voice. Surely we may consider Shelley supreme in the lyric.

III

“I claim no place in the world of letters; I am alone, and will be alone, as long as I live, and after,” wrote Lander (1775-1864). Time has tested the truth of this proud, half-defiant statement; his place in English poetry is secure, but he stands indeed alone, with no followers. His personality is a unique one. Ordinarily we study a writer’s life because it is reflected in his verse and explains much that would otherwise be unintelligible; we read Lander’s career chiefly to see how utterly different from the poet was the man. Everything about him seems paradoxical. Proud of his aristocratic family, he despised the nobility; loving freedom, he hated democracy and said some severe things about America; a thorough Grecian in his tastes, he disliked Plato; revolting against society, he wrote contemptuously of Byron, the poet of revolt; often a keen and penetrating critic (witness his exquisite commentary on Dante’s Paolo and Francesca) he considered Southey a great poet. From his Oxford days, his life was disturbed by a long series of disputes and quarrels; he writes in his finest epigram—English poetry can not show one more exquisite in its dignity and restraint—“I strove with none, for none was worth my strife.”

Amid all these contradictions, there was one unifying principle in his nature—his classicism; with the single exception of Milton, he is the most classical of all English poets.

From boyhood he had been attracted by Greek and Italian literature. He was often in doubt whether to write in English or Latin. *Gebir* (1798), his first important poem, was written in both languages, and he has said that whenever the English word he sought failed him, the Latin phrase would be at his tongue's end. It is not surprising that as Donne turned from the beauty worship of the Elizabethans, Landor, wearied of "too much froth and too much fire," abandoned the manner of the romantic school and wrote in the style of Meleager or of Martial at his best.

In his essay on Landor, Professor Dowden remarks that discussions on the differences that exist between classic and romantic art invariably put the reader to sleep; yet in spite of this warning, we must consider the question briefly. The difference between the romantic and classic is one of treatment rather than of subject-matter. A writer may be classic in a poem describing New York harbor and conversely, Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* enriches a classic theme with the wealth of romantic art. It is obvious that we can not describe in a few phrases any of the great modes of human thought, but in general we may point out that the romantic spirit yearning for the unattainable, aims to suggest, to touch the reader's imagination; half the beauty of Shelley's *To Night* lies in the mood it invokes. The classic poem is clearly and sharply drawn; the art is complete; the last word has been spoken. What a difference between Antigone, with her task plain before her, and Hamlet, uncertain, wavering, lost in a maze of thought. We understand the character of the Greek heroine but will any one ever pluck out the heart of Hamlet's mystery? Our modern poetry, with its subtle shadings, touches more closely on the spiritual world; the enchantments of Circe are less mysterious than the phantoms that appal the *Ancient Mariner*. The discontent, the struggle, the aspiration of our modern life are remote from the dignity and calm with which the ancient poets, even when

they despaired, faced the problems of life and death. They felt deeply, but the feeling was controlled. We see this in a moment if we consider Landor's epigram once more:

"I strove with none; for none was worth my strife,
Nature I loved, and next to Nature, Art;
I warmed both hands before the fire of life,
It sinks, and I am ready to depart."¹

How definite is the picture of the old man bending with outstretched hands over the dying embers; with what dignity is the emotion repressed. We feel the modern spirit if we contrast this with Browning's *Prospice*, with its cry of exulting struggle, or with Tennyson's *Crossing the Bar*, with its music, its twilight tones, its mystery of the sea.

Landor, with his deliberate art, rarely felt the lyric impulse; there is no spontaneity in his style; every effect is carefully prepared. His verse moves soberly; for the slow, impressive line that fills the ear, he rejected the lighter measures, and said that Scott's verse was to be jumped, not danced or sung. In spite of this lack of the song element, we have included him among our lyrists because he has many short poems both musical and subjective. Poetry, he declared, was his amusement; prose, his study and business, and accordingly his verse occupies but little room in his works, yet it offers many if not infinite riches.

The moment we read these brief poems, we think of the Greek Anthology. Between five and six thousand Greek epigrams have come down to us. They resemble in no wise the modern epigram; as the name indicates, they were short inscriptions written to be placed on tombs and altars, on monuments or public buildings. Written almost invariably in the elegiac metre, they rarely exceeded twelve lines; four, six, and eight verses was the favorite length. Gradually the

¹C. G. Crump, *Poems, Dialogues in Verse and Epigrams by Walter Savage Landor*, London, 1892, vol. II, p. 223.

epigram included any short poem written in elegiacs and the Anthology accordingly offers a wide range of subjects—life and death, love and art. Many of the epigrams are lyrical in all but their form, and indeed Meleager speaks of them as hymns or songs. Two examples of his own work show this lyric quality:

“ Evermore in mine ears eddies the sound of Love, and mine eye carries the silent sweetness of a tear to the Desires; neither does night nor light let me rest, but already my enchanted heart bears the well-known imprint. Ah, winged Loves, why do you ever know how to fly towards me, but have no whit of strength to fly away?”

“ Now the white violet blooms, and blooms the moist narcissus, and bloom the mountain-ranging lilies; and now, dear to her lovers, spring flower among the flowers, Zenophile, the sweet rose of Persuasion, has burst into bloom. Meadows, why idly laugh in the brightness of your tresses? for my girl is better than garlands sweet to smell.”¹

Short as these snatches of song are many of Landor's love poems. They are generally graceful, courtly compliments:

“ I love to hear that men are bound
By your enchanting links of sound:
I love to hear that none rebel
Against your beauty's silent spell.
I know not whether I may bear
To see it all, as well as hear;
And never shall I clearly know
Unless you nod and tell me so.”²

This is almost Herrick again save that it lacks some picture of a flower or jewel. These poems have little or no unity; there is no dominant feeling running through them as there

¹ J. W. Mackail, *Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology*, new edition, London, 1906, pp. 100, 103.

² *Poems*, II, p. 97.

is in Wordsworth's sonnets or Byron's lyrics. They are detached thoughts interesting for the manner in which they are expressed. How far removed from the passion of the romanticists is the narrative lyric "It is no dream that I am he." How thoroughly in the spirit of the Anthology is the lament:

"She I love (alas in vain!)
Floats before my slumbering eyes:
When she comes she lulls my pain,
When she goes what pangs arise!
Thou whom love, whom memory flies,
Gentle Sleep! prolong thy reign!
If even thus she soothe my sighs,
Never let me wake again!"¹

One of his love poems is immortal—the lament for Rose Aylmer. Here in but eight verses, written by a man stirred to the depths yet outwardly calm, we find expressed the grief of a life time. Poe asserted that the most pathetic subject a writer could devise was the death of a young and beautiful maiden mourned by her lover. *The Raven* and *Rose Aylmer* are alike in theme but one is the most romantic, the other the most classic of elegies.

In a number of his best poems he has chiselled his own form. It is a strong and placid face that we see. In his views on life and death and nature he is always calm and composed. Shelley, in his lament for the change that comes over all lovely things, can not restrain himself; Landor writes with composure:

"I see the rainbow in the sky,
The dew upon the grass,
I see them, and I ask not why
They glimmer or they pass."²

¹ *Poems*, II, p. 89.

² II, p. 130.

His friends depart, Death stands before him whispering low, but the poet has no fear at his strange language. There is no outcry, no revolt, though

"spring and summer both are past,
And all things sweet."

Such a writer can never win popular applause and Landor proudly disdained it. "I shall dine late," he wrote, "but the dining room will be well lighted, the guests few and select."¹ Art does indeed endure and Landor will always find "fit audience, though few."

The beauty of Grecian myths, the grace and splendor of the ancient world entered into the very life of John Keats (1795-1821). With Landor he found in Hellas an inspiration that shaped his whole career, for in writing *Endymion* he discovered his own powers. Unlike Landor, he gave to his classic themes the most romantic treatment. If we may call Landor a sculptor, Keats is a painter using all the warmth and glow of modern coloring. The spirit of Greece touched both these writers but it led them through paths that never met.

In the early death of Keats, English poetry sustained its greatest loss. Had Marlowe lived, the spirit of his day would have bound him to the drama for which he was temperamentally unfitted. Chatterton was attracted by the age of feudalism; his inspiration was tenuous; and as we have seen, his acknowledged writing is disconcertingly poor. Byron and Shelley lived long enough to tell their message and to gain a mastery of the style they most desired. Keats, despite the perfection of certain poems, never reached his maturity; the fate he most feared—that he should die before he reaped the garners of his mind—overtook him. Yet the rapidity of his development is as remarkable as his actual

¹ Sidney Colvin, *Selections from the writings of Landor*, London, 1890, p. 345. This admirable book should do for Landor what Arnold accomplished for Wordsworth.

accomplishment. Spenser, Dryden, and Milton, in rapid succession, taught him their secrets. Shakespeare, both in his sonnets and his plays, was a constant inspiration; Homer and Dante opened new worlds to him, yet in all his imitation and assimilation, there was a conscious and definite process of finding himself. No man has recorded more beautifully a love for the great masters of song. When he writes, he hears their music but like the sound of the wind in the leaves or the song of birds, it never disturbs but rather inspires his own poetry.¹ "I was never afraid of failure; for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest," he wrote, and such high ambition would not permit him to be any man's disciple though he could learn from many bards of Passion and of Mirth. "I will write independently," he tells Hessey. "The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man." With Milton, he was ready to dedicate his whole life to his art. He realized his own defects and was determined to overcome them; if he lacked a broad outlook on life, he would gain one by a study of philosophy. "There is but one way for me. The road lies through application, study, and thought. I will pursue it; and, for that end, purpose retiring for some years."² Those years were denied him.

Such words are the more remarkable coming from one filled with the creative impulse. He believed that poetry must come naturally or not at all and according to the testimony of his friends, he wrote with that same ease that aroused the admiration of Shakespeare's contemporaries. Indeed, he could not restrain his pen. He is all in a tremble because he has written no verses; he composes a sonnet and sleeps the better for it, but wakes in the morning "nearly as bad again." (From Winchester he writes Reynolds that he had

See the sonnet "How many bards," H. B. Forman, *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, Oxford, 1910, p. 35.

² H. B. Forman, *The Poetical Works and other Writings of John Keats*, London, 1883, vol. III, pp. 230-1, 148.

been walking in the stubble fields and had found the autumn coloring more beautiful than the chilly green of spring. Then follows, as one might enclose a leaf turned crimson, the *Ode to Autumn*. With a supreme carelessness, Keats scattered through his letters some of the most perfect of English poems. The sheer power that resided in that sickly frame never was fully disclosed; the sure and steady development of Keats is as marvellous as his finest writing; above all others, he is the one we would recall to earth.

He understood perfectly wherein lay his power and in one verse he proclaimed his creed: "I follow Beauty, of her train am I." The questions of church and state that stirred Shelley to the depths had small interest for him; his sonnet "written in disgust of vulgar superstition," inspired by the sound of church bells, seems a discord in his music. It was not his task to attack the existing social order or plan a new creation; he had no desire to expound a new system of philosophy or to discover a moral interpretation of nature. He often recited with the greatest admiration Wordsworth's *Ode on Immortality*, but in the end, Wordsworth's metaphysics utterly repelled him. He refused to visit Shelley because he wished to maintain his own unfettered scope. His nature was not speculative; he loved the earth as he found it and searched in it for but one thing—a beauty that could be grasped. A typical anecdote of Shelley pictures him floating out to sea with the terrified Jane Williams, asking her if she did not wish then and there to solve the great mystery of death. Equally characteristic is the description Keats gives of himself at Oxford, exploring in his boat the windings of the Char: "We sometimes skim into a bed of rushes, and there become naturalised river-folks." He finds, as does every genius, that the beauty of the world is new and unknown. As though Shakespeare and Herrick had never written, he describes the flowers in gardens and fields; he revels in the odors of the earth; he listens with

the joy of a discoverer to the song of the birds. We have to-day patient and careful observers of nature, but too often they merely tabulate what they see; with Keats, observation is always fused with emotion. Nature's loveliness is inexhaustible; here was enough for one who wrote "with a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration."¹

[Keats sought for beauty not only in the earth but in that other world of books. He read with a keen eye and ear; "I look upon fine phrases as a lover," he said, and he adorned his verse with many a phrase culled with exquisite taste from the masters of poetry. He is continually reading; he can not exist without poetry; half the day will not do for it, he needs all the hours. We have seen how the Wartons tricked out their odes with whole passages of Milton; Keats intuitively culls the right word. The title of an early English poem gives him his *Belle Dame sans Merci*; he knew Milton's

"As the wakeful bird
Sings darkling,"

and remembers it in the "Darkling I listen" of his own *Ode to a Nightingale*. Many a line, such as "How tiptoe Night holds back her dark grey hood," has the impress of Shakespeare's style, and again and again he has caught the melody of the *Faerie Queene*—"Spenserian vowels that elope with ease." Mr. Bridges has pointed out many lapses of taste in the diction of Keats, and yet at his best his sense of the beauty and music of words is as high as his perception of color and form.

His imagination fairly revelled in beauty. He was governed by what he called "the mighty abstract idea of beauty in all things," and he felt that he did not live in this world alone but in a thousand worlds. He was certain of nothing

¹ P. 100.

but of the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of imagination, for "what the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth."¹) Everything, with him, tended but to one end and his poetic vision found Madeline's bower or Latmos even more lovely than a little hill decked with the flowers of an English May. There are indeed many conceptions of beauty. The Hedonist and the Platonist would each find a different charm in the same object; the modern poet discovers a fascination in bleak coasts and in the waste places of the earth; he hears a lyric in the songless reeds. To many beauty has a disquieting allurements; it even leads, as it did the "knight-at-arms," to death. Keats is an Elizabethan reborn. An idealist, he yet finds beauty before him and can grasp it. When asked why he makes a long poem of *Endymion* he replies that it must be full of pleasant passages to which the lover of verse may retire, and everywhere he shows that fine excess which he declares constitutes the chief delight of verse.

We may now see why song, the simplest form of the lyric, so rarely attracted Keats. It offered too little opportunity for those splendid passages that dazzle the eye and fill the ear with melodies. He wrote, however, two—sharply contrasted but equally beautiful. His *Faery Song*

"Shed no tear—O shed no tear!

The flower will bloom another year,"

might indeed have been sung by Ariel; no higher praise could be given it. "In a drear-nighted December" comes as near Shelley's mood as Keats ever approached save that the lament of the last stanza is not bitter enough:

"To know the change and feel it,
When there is none to heal it,
Nor numbed sense to steel it,
Was never said in rhyme."

La Belle Dame sans Merci is so intensely subjective that we may claim it as a lyric.) This poem, rather than Collins's *Ode on the Superstitions of the Scottish Highlands*, may be said to contain the germ of the romantic school. (Here is the very essence of romance—fear added to beauty—and so perfect is the poet's art that one is at a loss what to admire the most: the imagery, the delicacy of treatment, or the form. Here is a rhythm that expresses absolutely the mood of the writer. The melancholy effect of the shortened fourth line is indescribable:)

(“ And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.”)

It was natural that Keats, a fervent admirer of Shakespeare's sonnets, should have left some sixty sonnets of his own. Many of them are surprisingly poor, written in no serious mood, but added to his letters as one might scrawl a pen sketch on the margin. Ten of his sonnets, so Bridges believes, comprise his best work; Matthew Arnold has chosen eight, and these are enough to place Keats with our finest sonneteers.² Of the ones written in the Italian form, *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer* is his masterpiece and indeed its sestet for its perfect picture of the poet's mood (is it not one of the finest similes in the language?) and for its breadth and amplitude of suggestion, is unsurpassed in our sonnet literature.) In this same form, “To one who has been long in city pent,” and “The poetry of earth is never dead,” are beautiful expressions of a lighter mood. The first has caught the languor and the tenderness of a summer's day; the second shows Keats resembling Burns

¹ Forman, *Keats*, 1910, pp. 311, 338, 356.

² See Bridges' Introduction to *The Poems of John Keats, Muses' Library*, London, 1896.

by his interest in the life of the small creatures of the earth.

For his deepest utterances, Keats turned to the Shakespearean sonnet. "When I have fears that I may cease to be," is so rich in its expression that its intense though restrained pathos is at times obscured. What could be more typical of Keats's conception of beauty heightened by a sense of mystery than such an imaginative phrase as

"When I behold, upon the night's starred face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance."

Of his last sonnet, *Bright star*, it can be said without fear of contradiction that no one of Shakespeare's surpasses its rare union of emotional force, melody, and imaginative description.

The odes of Keats are not only the greatest lyric achievement, but they are the finest expression of his genius. They possess the beauty of the finest passages in *Endymion* or the *Eve of St. Agnes*—indeed their music is of a higher and subtler quality—and two at least have in marked degree that subjective element which brings verse closer to us, or rather catches us up into the poet's heaven. (In these poems we find all the traits of mind which we have discussed—the intense perception of beauty in nature, in art, in literature; and in the world which the imagination can create. The odes differ absolutely in their tone and consequently in their effect, agreeing only in their exquisite workmanship. In his essay on the letters of Keats, Bradley has written that the poet's genius "showed itself soonest and perhaps most completely in the rendering of Nature,"¹ and this agrees with Mr. Bridges's judgment that *To Autumn* is the most perfect of all the odes. It has unusual restraint and yet every line brings some new picture to the eye. The personification of Autumn is exquisitely imagined; it is no

¹ A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, London, 1909, p. 232.

statue that we see before us but a sleeping woman. Such an ode pleases equally the classic and the romantic taste. The *Ode to a Nightingale* has the greatest emotional quality and like some splendid tapestry, blends many colors. We have almost a Byronic mood in the picture of the weariness and fever of modern life)

"Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;"

we have a richness of description that vies with the *Prothalamion* and surpasses it, because of the modern sense of mystery:)

"I can not see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,"

and above all we have that perfect union of the real and the unreal, for as surely as we hear the song of the bird we hear other notes that charm the magic casements of fairy lands.

The *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, despite its popularity, does not rank with his best two odes; indeed, above it should be placed the little-known *Ode to Sorrow* from the fourth book of *Endymion*. The opening stanzas are Elizabethan in their music:

"To Sorrow,
I bade good-morrow,
And thought to leave her far away behind;
But cheerly, cheerly,
She loves me dearly;
She is so constant to me, and so kind.

Would any one suspect this to be by Keats? Then follows a lyrical description of Bacchus and his crew which, for color and magnificence of sound, seems a page of the *Arabian*

Nights set to music. All that Spenser gave to lyric-verse, Keats equalled and surpassed.

IV

In Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) and Thomas Campbell (1777-1844) we reach the lyrics of patriotism and war, the best songs of action that this age produced.

It has become too much the fashion of late to speak apologetically, even slightly, of Scott's verse, and to value him almost exclusively as a novelist.¹ Scott himself, with his fine and modest spirit, disclaimed too readily his poetic gift and it must be admitted at once that not only is his field a limited one, but even his most characteristic work is uneven in quality. At his best, he is unrivalled; his battle scenes are described with such force and vigor that they have no equals in the language; his pictures of the splendor and color of the last days of chivalry are still unmatched. Any doubts as to the validity of Scott's inspiration will vanish at a reading of the stag hunt in the *Lady of the Lake*, the death of Constance, and the battle of Flodden, in *Marmion*, to name three widely differing passages.

Scott's best work, if we look for sustained writing, and disregard the brilliant but detached passages from the poetic tales, is to be found in his lyrics. Bacon tells us that Demosthenes was once asked what was the chief part of an orator. He answered, *action*: What next? *action*: What next again? *action*. Judged by such a standard, Scott's lyrics are distinguished above those of most writers, for action is his great quality. Bacon then proceeds to decry action in a speaker as a paltry thing which the ignorant admire; to give life and movement to verse is no easy matter. Scott had been brought up on the ballads; if he never, except in *Proud*

¹ See for example Arthur Symons, *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry*, London, 1909, pp. 108-119.

Maisie, attained their pathos or tragic force, he caught their simplicity of diction, their rapidity of action. At times his verse fairly leaps:

“ Like adder darting from his coil,
Like wolf that dashes through the toil,
Like mountain-cat who guards her young,
Full at Fitz-James’s throat he sprung.”¹

No one has written anapests that speed more lightly or more rapidly than his:

“ One touch to her hand, and one word in her ear,
When they reach’d the hall-door, and the charger stood near;
So light to the croupe the fair lady he swung,
So light to the saddle before her he sprung!
‘ She is won! we are gone, over bank, bush, and scaur;
They’ll have fleet steeds that follow,’ quoth young Lochin-
var.”²

Professor Saintsbury has spoken enthusiastically yet advisedly of the success of such a stanza. We have seen this metre used for whimsical, trifling, half-serious and half-jesting love poetry; Scott makes a new thing of it. Not only is there “racing and chasing on Cannobie Lee,” but in every verse of *The Cavalier’s Song* in *Rokeby* or the better-known *Bonnie Dundee*. To write anapests with this ballad movement is no slight achievement, for no other metre, not even the octosyllabic couplet, degenerates so rapidly into doggerel.

Many other of his lyrics have this same spirited rhythm. What better marching song could there be than

¹ J. L. Robertson, *The Poetical Works of Walter Scott*, Oxford, 1909, p. 255.

² P. 143.

“ March, march, Ettrick and Teviotdale,
Why the deil dinna ye march forward in order?
March, march, Eskdale and Liddesdale,
All the blue bonnets are bound for the Border.
Many a banner spread,
Flutters above your head,
Many a crest that is famous in story.
Mount and make ready then,
Sons of the mountain glen,
Fight for the Queen and our old Scottish glory.”¹

Scott is at his best when the clans go out to battle, yet the war song echoes in all types of his lyrics. We have read many lullabies from Greene to Blake in which the mother or an angel guards the child; with Scott, a warrior stands near the cradle:

“ O, fear not the bugle, though loudly it blows,
It calls but the warders that guard thy repose;
Their bows would be bended, their blades would be red,
Ere the step of a foeman draws near to thy bed.”²

The lyric of the deserted maiden has said nothing hitherto of war, but Scott can not forget the battle:

“ Where shall the traitor rest,
He, the deceiver,
Who could win maiden’s breast,
Ruin, and leave her?
In the lost battle,
Borne down by the flying,
Where mingles war’s rattle
With groans of the dying.”³

In his few love lyrics, Scott writes poorly; when he attempts a more thoughtful or heightened style, as in his

¹ P. 790.

² P. 729.

³ P. 118.

song to the moon in *Rokeby*, his skill vanishes. He could write the dirge for lovely Rosabelle, but he could have written no deep and passionate protestation of devotion to her. If Scott's lyrics move to the simplest music, yet there is always a melody:

" And each St. Clair was buried there,
With candle, with book, and with knell;
But the sea-caves rung, and the wild winds sung,
The dirge of lovely Rosabelle."¹

There is something of Campion's direct style in that lively little hunting song, "Waken, lords and ladies gay"; certainly it has the metre and the simple diction of his

" Never love unless you can
Bear with all the faults of man."

Three lyrics of Scott are decidedly better than the rest of his songs. Two of them were inspired by a few lines from old songs, but "Why weep ye by the tide, ladie," is no ingenious imitation, it is the very essence of the ballad lyric, and the song from *Rokeby* far surpasses its original, "It was a' for our rightful king." Scott's lyric has the true haunting quality, as Clive Newcome found:

" 'This morn is merry June, I trow,
The rose is budding fain;
But she shall bloom in winter snow,
Ere we two meet again.'
He turned his charger as he spake,
Upon the river shore,
He gave his bridle-reins a shake,
Said, 'Adieu for evermore,
My love!
And adieu for evermore.' "²

¹ P. 45.

² P. 341.

His masterpiece is *Proud Maisie*. Here is a situation that would have appealed to Poe, but how differently would he have treated it. Scott gains his effect by his brevity; Nature does not suggest death but pronounces the girl's doom:

“ The glow-worm o'er grave and stone
Shall light thee steady.
The owl from the steeple sing,
' Welcome, proud lady.' ”¹

Thomas Campbell tried his hand at various styles of verse composition. *The Pleasures of Hope* resembles the Queen Anne verse essay; *Gertrude of Wyoming* and *The Pilgrim of Glencoe* are pure narrative; *Lines on Poland*, or *The Power of Russia* are political manifestos. From all these poems the interest has faded; Campbell's war lyrics still remain among the finest in the language.

This is to say that Campbell had but one gift. He could express most admirably the shock of battle and the thrill of patriotism. He has a measured eloquence that few writers of war songs have attained, for surely *Ye Mariners of England* and the *Battle of the Baltic* stand alone. There is no more dreary reading than collections of patriotic songs, but the expression of a nation's spirit was Campbell's opportunity. At times his writing is so poor that his climaxes are not only weak but positively ludicrous, as in the closing stanza of his ballad of the *Ritter Bann*:

“ One moment may with bliss repay
Unnumbered hours of pain;
Such was the throb and mutual sob
Of the knight embracing Jane,”

yet the man who wrote that cheap jingle also wrote:

“ Britannia needs no bulwarks,
No towers along the steep;
Her march is o’er the mountain waves,
Her home is on the deep.
With thunders from her native oak
She quells the floods below,
As they roar on the shore
When the stormy winds do blow,—
When the battle rages loud and long
And the stormy winds do blow.”¹

Surely this is something more than brilliant rhetoric.

With Lovelace, Campbell needed a war to arouse his mind and feeling, and we may add, his artistic sense. He found some good lines in the old song, *Ye Gentlemen of England*, and with this suggestion he made his *Mariners of England* from which we have just quoted a typical stanza. He wrote his *Battle of the Baltic* first in twenty-six stanzas of six lines, some of them singularly feeble and ineffective. He condensed this first version to eight stanzas, altering the metre and saving, with the best of judgment, every good line. As this is one of the happiest instances of successful revision it is worth while to give two stanzas in their first form and then show what he made from them:

“ The bells shall ring! the day
Shall not close
But a blaze of cities bright
Shall illuminate the night,
And the wine-cup shine in light
As it flows!

¹J. L. Robertson, *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Campbell*, Oxford, 1907, pp. 184, 188.

“ Yet, yet amid the joy
And uproar,
Let us think of them that sleep
Full many a fathom deep
All beside thy rocky steep,
Elsinore!”

This becomes :

“ Now joy, Old England, raise
For the tidings of thy might
By the festal cities’ blaze,
While the wine-cup shines in light;
And yet, amidst that joy and uproar,
Let us think of them that sleep,
Full many a fathom deep,
By thy wild and stormy steep,
Elsinore!”¹

Hohenlinden, half narrative, half lyrical, has the same effectiveness of rhythm and energy of expression that lends these patriotic odes their value. As in the case of Scott, Campbell’s love poetry is poor. *The Wounded Hussar*, we are told by Beattie, was sung in the streets of Glasgow and became popular everywhere. It is certainly quite different from the modern street song:

“ Alone to the banks of the dark-rolling Danube
Fair Adelaide hied when the battle was o’er:
‘ Oh, whither,’ she cried, ‘ hast thou wandered, my lover?
Or here dost thou welter and bleed on the shore?’ ”

Not merely the rhythm but the sentiment of this poem reminds us that we are approaching the vogue of Tom Moore; we feel this in the *Soldier’s Dream*, with its line adapted from Lovelace:

¹ Pp. 195, 191.

“ Our bugles sang truce—for the night-cloud had lowered,
And the sentinel stars set their watch in the sky,”¹

though Campbell rarely caught the easy, familiar style of the *Irish Melodies*.

V

We come to the lighter side of the lyric in the poems of Moore and Praed. Tom Moore (1779-1852) forsook his birthplace, as most Irish writers have done, and made himself the favorite of London drawing-rooms. He was clever and witty in conversation; he had a rare faculty for making friends (witness Byron's over-enthusiastic praise of Moore's poetry); and his writings hit the popular fancy. At the height of his fame he was easily considered a much greater poet than Wordsworth or Shelley. Time has dealt hardly with him; indeed, he himself saw his reputation wane, but though his satirical and humorous verse has lost its sparkle, and though the rococo work of *Lalla Rookh* has become sadly tarnished, his *Irish Melodies* will never lack readers. Once more, a poet's best work is contained in his lyrics.

We have many pictures of Moore, but none more vivid than the sketch Willis gives of him. He heard Moore talk of Ireland—"the whole country in convulsions—people's lives, fortunes and religion at stake"—yet on such a subject what Willis finds most characteristic is "the delicacy and elegance of Moore's language," the "kind of frost-work of imagery which was formed and melted on his lips!" He heard Moore sing. "He makes no attempt at music. It is a kind of admirable recitative, in which every shade of thought is syllabled and dwelt upon, and the sentiment of the song goes through your blood, warming you to the very eyelids, and starting your tears, if you have a soul or sense in you. I have heard of women's fainting at a song of

¹ Pp. 197, 198.

Moore's; and if the burden of it answered by chance to a secret in the bosom of the listener, I should think, from its comparative effect upon so old a stager as myself, that the heart would break with it."¹ The tears that were shed over *Clarissa Harlowe* now flow at Moore's songs. It is the revival of the sentimental school, and Moore's lyrics represent the best form of the tender stanzas that adorned the *Annuals* and *Garlands* of the second quarter of the century.

It was a happy thought that prompted the publication of a series of Irish melodies with words written for them by Moore. From 1807 to 1834 the melodies appeared in separate parts with twelve songs in each. The music, arranged so simply that a child could play it, was in a large measure responsible for the success of this venture, for many of the melodies were extremely beautiful. Endless repetition has not yet destroyed the appeal of *Believe me, if all those endearing young charms*, or of *The Last Rose of Summer*. Moore insisted that his only talent lay in discovering the emotion or sentiment in the melody and then translating it into words; he even went so far as to desire that his songs be always sung and never read. It is true that in nearly every case, his words fit the music perfectly. He had no help whatever from Irish poetry or from the verses long associated with these folk tunes, as many of them were. *The Groves of Blarney* becomes *The Last Rose of Summer*; *O, Patrick fly from me* and *Paddy Whack* are transformed to *When first I met thee* and *While History's Muse*; *The Pretty girl milking her cow* and *The girl I left behind me* are changed to *The valley lay smiling before me* and *As slow our ship*.

It is amusing to observe that Moore gravely informed his English readers that there was nothing "revolutionary" in these poems, and he speaks of his work as his "patriotic task." A most casual reading of the *Irish Melodies* reveals

¹ N. P. Willis, *Pencilings by the Way*, London, 1839, p. 368.

their lack of national spirit. Certainly we find allusions to the minstrel's harp, to Erin, to Tara's halls, to Irish saints and heroes, patriots and exiles, but the heart of the matter is not in these sentimental ditties composed for London drawing-rooms. Collins in his unfinished ode realized more clearly than did Moore in all his melodies what the Celtic spirit is. Moore wrote a song on the gloomy lake in Donegal believed by the peasants to be the mouth of Purgatory and the abode of spirits.¹ There is not the slightest shudder or mystery in his stanzas as there is, for example, in "Moirá O'Neill's" *Fairy Lough*:

"Loughareema, Loughareema;
When the sun goes down at seven,
When the hills are dark an' airy,
'Tis a curlew whistles sweet!
Then somethin' rustles all the reeds
That stand so thick an' even;
A little wave runs up the shore
An' flees, as if on feet."

If it seems unfair to contrast Moore with the writers of the neo-Celtic school (for he lacked their knowledge of Irish legend and poetry), we can justly compare him with Burns. In the songs of Burns we have the Scotch peasant as he lived and loved and caroused; we hear the very words he used. In Moore there is no Irish dialect, no smell of the soil, nothing that comes from the heart of the folk. There is indeed a devotion to Erin expressed many times, but it has none of the ring of "Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled." There is little of Irish thought or life in

"When Love, rocked by his mother,
Lay sleeping as calm as slumber could make him"

¹ *I wish I was by that dim lake.*

or

“The young May moon is beaming, love,
The glow-worm’s lamp is gleaming, love,
How sweet to rove
Through Morna’s grove,
When the drowsy world is dreaming, love!”¹

Compare this with *Of a’ the airts* and we realize instantly the difference between sentimental fancy and that emotion whose natural language is verse. If we do not wish to leave Ireland, let the reader compare the lyrics of Mangan, who died three years before Moore, with the lyrics from the *Irish Melodies* that are published in the *Dublin Book of Irish Verse* and he will see how deep is the gulf that separates the patriotic lyric from the song for polite society.

The artificiality of many of these songs—their conventional allusions to the harp, the bowl, the rose, the moon (how rarely the moon appears in the songs of Burns)—must not blind us to their one splendid quality: they are perfectly adapted to music and constantly suggest it. How few of the lyrics of Byron or Shelley are suitable for musical accompaniment. At his best, Moore has a genuine pathos. “She is far from the land,” or to leave the *Irish Melodies*, “Come, ye disconsolate,” and above all, “Oft in the stilly night,” have a tender melancholy that atones for many an insincere and insipid song. His finest lyric shows this same mood, expressed with a music that is unsurpassed elsewhere in his verse:

“I saw from the beach, when the morning was shining,
A bark o’er the waters move gloriously on;
I came when the sun o’er that beach was declining,
The bark was still there, but the waters were gone.

¹ A. D. Godley, *The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore*, Oxford, 1910, pp. 227, 202.

“ And such is the fate of our life’s early promise,
 So passing the spring-tide of joy we have known;
Each wave, that we danced on at morning, ebbs from us,
 And leaves us, at eve, on the bleak shore alone.

“ Ne’er tell me of glories, serenely adorning
 The close of our day, the calm eve of our night;—
Give me back, give me back the wild freshness of Morning,
 Her clouds and her tears are worth Evening’s best light.”¹

Winthrop Mackworth Praed (1802-1839) hardly justified the brilliant promise of his student days, and as in the case of Moore, a much better poet, the greater part of his work has now little significance. His best quality was his wit, his ability to express a clever phrase in an apt metre, but he desired to write in a serious vein. Thus we find in the *Troubadour* a number of sentimental songs, of which *My Mother’s Grave* is the best. In general, when Praed would be emotional, his feeling is too obvious; there is no personality behind it, and his too facile metres deepen the impression of artificiality:

“ So glad a life was never, love,
 As that which childhood leads,
Before it learns to sever, love,
 The roses from the weeds;
When to be very duteous, love,
 Is all it has to do;
And every flower is beauteous, love,
 And every folly true.”²

This reads like Moore in his weakest moments.

It is when Praed turns to the light satire of fashionable folly, when he writes of the artificial life of the day, that he is at his very best. No one has quite caught his tone, though

¹ P. 209.

² A. D. Godley, *Select Poems of Winthrop Mackworth Praed*, Oxford, 1909, p. 19.

he foretells *London Lyrics* and the modern school of society verse in his *Good-Night to the Season*:

“ Good night to the Season!—the dances,
 The fillings of hot little rooms,
 The glancings of rapturous glances,
 The fancyings of fancy costumes;
 The pleasures which fashion makes duties,
 The praisings of fiddles and flutes,
 The luxury of looking at Beauties,
 The tedium of talking to mutes;
 The female diplomatists, planners
 Of matches for Laura and Jane;
 The ice of her Ladyship’s manners,
 The ice of his Lordship’s champagne.”¹

Praed has one or two tricks he repeats too often; his use of zeugma:

“ He cleared the drawbridge and his throat,
 He crossed his forehead and the moat,”

loses its effect, but his gaiety never flags and he is an artist in lighter metres. His two most successful pieces, *Our Ball* and *A Letter of Advice*, can not by any chance be considered lyrical, and he comes before us as the first in point of time of our modern *vers de société* writers rather than as one who has contributed much to this delightful *genre*.

Praed has brought us to the minor poets of the period. Campbell certainly belongs among them but we found it convenient to consider him with Scott. We shall consider but three others—omitting several well-known names. Of these the most popular is Thomas Hood (1799-1845). We shall not concern ourselves with his humorous lyrics except to remark that it is a misfortune that by far the greater part of his verse aims to be nothing more than clever trifling. In his serious work there are two distinct

¹ P. 121.

moods: he is the social reformer and he is the artist. A small group of poems—*The Lady's Dream*, *The Workhouse Clock*, *The Lay of the Labourer*, *The Song of the Shirt*, *The Bridge of Sighs*—show the humanitarian side of his nature; he has no philosophical theories of a possible regeneration of society, but he sees certain definite wrongs and he strikes at them. *The Song of the Shirt* is not merely a tract for Hood's times, but for all times; he was not a great enough writer to stamp out the sweatshop, yet it is true that this poem had more effect on the people of his day than some of the greater odes we have considered. True and sincere as is its pathos, its workmanship is not at all remarkable and it must yield to *The Bridge of Sighs*.

If the reader will turn to our remarks upon Raleigh's *Lie* or to those sonnets of Shakespeare which express dissatisfaction with the social order, he will find that we appreciated the vigor and force of these poems. Here we have a more effective complaint of man's inhumanity, because instead of generalizations, of indignation at the thought of "Captive Good attending Captain Ill," we have the picture of the friendless girl standing

"with amazement,
Houseless by night.

"The bleak wind of March
Made her tremble and shiver;
But not the dark arch,
Or the black flowing river:
Mad from life's history,
Glad to death's mystery,
Swift to be hurled—
Anywhere, anywhere
Out of the world!"

We are too prone to neglect the work of the present. Here is a dirge for the outcast which stands absolutely alone in

its pathos, its intensity, its artistic restraint. How quietly this fearful arraignment of modern society closes:

“Cross her hands humbly,
As if praying dumbly,
Over her breast!

“Owning her weakness,
Her evil behaviour,
And leaving, with meekness,
Her sins to her Saviour!”

The short line, which in other hands might become jerky, fits the mood, for it brings the picture and the emotion to us at once; skillful is the use of assonance and the chant of the chorus:

“Take her up tenderly
Lift her with care;
Fashioned so slenderly,
Young, and so fair!”¹

In what we have called, for the sake of contrast, Hood's art lyrics, his pathos is still evident. At times it is merely a gentle melancholy, as in his *Fair Ines*, whose melody won the praise of Poe. It is fancy rather than imagination that we see in this picture of the beauty sailing to her lover in the West:

“I saw thee, lovely Ines,
Descend along the shore,
With bands of noble gentlemen,
And banners waved before;
And gentle youth and maidens gay,
And snowy plumes they wore;—
It would have been a beauteous dream,
—If it had been no more!”²

¹ W. Jerrold, *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hood*, Oxford, 1906, p. 643.

² P. 177.

The same may be said of his lament for his lost boyhood, "I remember, I remember," in which we see regret rather than that deep longing which Vaughan shows when he writes on the same subject.

In his rather meagre appreciation of Hood, Professor Saintsbury calls attention to the fact that the couplets in the fragment of the *Sea of Death* have something of Keats;¹ it is more interesting to notice poems in which Hood's material is plainly modelled on the older poet's work, for it is instructive to observe the difference between the poetry of a genius and of a talented, sensitive writer. Hood's *Water Lady* is a weaker *Belle Dame sans Merci*; his *Ode to Autumn*, though not without many original strokes, is plainly reminiscent of Keats's greater ode. And if Hood followed a modern poet, he also knew the work of the Jacobean and Caroline writers, for he has something of their quaintness of imagery and of their conceits. We hear Marvell in such a stanza as:

" 'Tis not trees' shade, but cloudy glooms
That on the cheerless valleys fall,
The flowers are in their grassy tombs,
And tears of dew are on them all,"²

while *The Death Bed* reminds one of the Dean of St. Paul's, though more harmonious and more tender than he would have made it:

" Our very hopes belied our fears,
Our fears our hopes belied—
We thought her dying when she slept,
And sleeping when she died !
" For when the morn came dim and sad,
And chill with early showers,
Her quiet eyelids closed—she had
Another morn than ours !"³

¹ *History of English Prosody*, vol. III, p. 145.

² P. 183.

³ P. 444.

In his own day, ~~Bryan Waller~~ Procter (1787-1874), better known as Barry Cornwall, was ranked with Moore as a song writer. We hear an echo of this mistaken opinion in the pages of Stedman's *Victorian Poets* (1876) in which more space is devoted to Procter than to Matthew Arnold. We are told that his songs "beyond those of any other modern, have an excellence of 'mode' which renders them akin to the melodies of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, Heywood, Fletcher," and Stoddard is quoted with approval when he doubts "whether all the early English poets ever produced so many and such beautiful songs as Barry Cornwall." To-day his work is so little regarded that neither Palgrave nor Quiller-Couch print in their anthologies a single line of his verse.

The third edition of Procter's songs appeared in 1851. This volume contained a preface, written in 1832, in which the poet lamented the fact that England is singularly barren of song writers, and it was plainly his ambition to fill what he considered to be the chief *lacuna* in English poetry. He admired Burns above all other lyrists, finding in his verse "an earnestness and directness of purpose which, if attended to, would strengthen the poetry of the present day." Unfortunately, Procter's aim was beyond him. Turning over his pages, the charm seems to have vanished from these once popular lyrics. Their diction is simple, their style is unaffected, they appear admirably adapted for music, but they lack all distinction and their artistic spirit and their imaginative quality is slight. Even his most quoted song is no longer read beyond the first two lines:

"The sea! the sea! the open sea!
The blue, the fresh, the ever free!"

We are hardly thrilled by

"I love (Oh! *how* I love) to ride
On the fierce foaming bursting tide."

Of all his lyrics (and he wrote too many), the *Hunter's Song*, "How many Summers, love," and "Touch us gently, Time!" represent his best work, yet these poems are far from being inspired.¹

We must pass by Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866), whose *Paper Money Lyrics*, parodying the manner of Wordsworth and Coleridge, of Scott, Campbell and Moore, furnish a comic relief to the high seriousness of their work. He was, however, much more than a satirist, and showed, in his serious moods, skill and talent. His ballad of Robin Hood has a free and attractive movement:

" Oh, bold Robin Hood is a forester good,
As ever drew bow in the merry greenwood!"

his *Love and Age* has the lightness of Praed; and his poem on the death of his child has much of the pathos of Hood.² We must also omit George Darley (1795-1846), an even better lyrist, whose songs in *Sylvia* have the grace and airiness of the Elizabethans in their gayest moods,³ and we close the chapter with Beddoes, a neglected poet, we may almost say a neglected genius.

Thomas Lovell Beddoes (1803-1849) was temperamentally an own brother to Webster and Tourneur, the last of the Elizabethan dramatists. He resembles them both in style and in morbid thought; his favorite lyric form is the dirge. Life for him was indeed a tragedy, for he died by his own hand.

The most characteristic work of Beddoes, *Death's Jest-Book*, is as sombre and terrible a drama as the *Duchess of*

¹ Barry Cornwall, *English Songs, and other small poems*, London, 1851, pp. 73, 81, 91, 208.

² B. Jonson, *The Poems of Thomas Love Peacock*, *Muses' Library*, London, 1906, pp. 284, 373, 328.

³ R. Colles, *The Complete Poetical Works of George Darley*, *Muses' Library*, London, N. D., pp. 83-206.

Malfi. Throughout its soliloquies and dialogues, the thought, the imagination, the fierce energy of many a line recall the most moving passages in the old drama. The songs are even more startling in their kinship to the lyrics of the Elizabethan playwrights, for Beddoes is no imitator but seems actually one of their number. He does not reproduce the light and airy melodies of Shakespeare; his songs are laments, the bridal hymn turning to the funeral song:

“ If thou wilt ease thine heart
Of love and all its smart,
Then die, dear, die.”

Even when we feel the influence of a modern writer, as in these lines that recall Shelley:

“ The swallow leaves her nest,
The soul my weary breast;”

he ends the lyric with the gloom of Webster:

“ The wind dead leaves and snow
Doth hurry to and fro;
And, once, a day shall break
O'er the wave,
When a storm of ghosts shall shake
The dead, until they wake
In the grave.”

It is this morbid strain in his writings more than their uneven quality that has robbed Beddoes of the fame he deserves. In his sadness he rarely approaches the obvious moods of sorrow; he has nothing to compare with Tennyson's "As through the land at eve we went," or "Home they brought her warrior dead." He appeals accordingly with most force to the lovers of the old poets, yet all must feel the haunting suggestion of his *Dream Pedlary*:

" If there were dreams to sell,
What would you buy?
Some cost a passing bell;
Some a light sigh,
That shakes from Life's fresh crown
Only a rose-leaf down.
If there were dreams to sell,
Merry and sad to tell,
And the crier rung the bell,
What would you buy?"¹

The lyrists of the Elizabethan age ran the gamut of emotion from the simplicity of Greene's songs to the subtlety of Donne's thought. With the exception of Milton and Herrick, they were succeeded by distinctly minor writers. The poets of our modern Renaissance have a wider range than the singers of Shakespeare's day, and furthermore they inspired another generation whose achievement far surpasses that of the Jacobean and Caroline poets. We are too near the nineteenth century to pass final judgment upon its work. Much that moves us may fail even to interest future generations; yet surely an age that produced the poets we have just considered, an age that led to the lyrists who await us in our next chapter, is more significant and more inspiring, in our chosen field, than the spacious times of great Elizabeth.

¹ R. Colles, *The Poems of Thomas Lovell Beddoes, Muses' Library*, London, N. D., pp. 31, 30, 356.

CHAPTER NINE

THE LYRIC OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

PART TWO

I

Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) above all other nineteenth century poets truly and adequately portrayed his land and his age. He was English to the heart's core. His verse shows more of his country's thought and feeling and character than does the poetry of any one of his predecessors, be it Byron, or Shelley, or Keats; or of any one of his contemporaries, be it Browning or Arnold, Swinburne or Rossetti. This does not imply any narrowness of mind; indeed, Thackeray, not given to hero-worship, called Tennyson the wisest man he had ever known. In many a passage the poet showed how deeply he had studied the classics. He loved Italy as English writers have always loved the

"lands of palm, of orange-blossom,
Of olive, aloe, and maize and vine!"

but above the glory that was Greece, the grandeur that was Rome, above "olive silvery Sirmio," or all else that Italy could offer, he prized England. He is the poet of English coasts and fields, of English traditions and beliefs, of English life, and character, and exploits. Arnold labors to reconstruct in his own tongue a Greek tragedy; Browning finds in Italy the theme for his greatest poem; it is characteristic that for his most extended work, Tennyson should turn to an English classic, Malory, and draw inspiration from legends that went deep into England's past.

Because Tennyson lived so completely in his own land, in his own day and generation, and not in spite of this, he has won his place beside our greatest poets, for are not a nation's great men those who represent most completely the spirit of their race? Cromwell was typically English in his virtues and his defects; Lincoln was thoroughly American, bearing the strong impress of a definite section of our country; every drop of blood in Bismarck's veins was German; while Hugo incarnates the weakness and the brilliancy of the Gallic spirit. That Tennyson's poetry was an epitome of his times, that it exhibited the society, the art, the philosophy, the religion of his day was proved by the welcome which all classes gave to it. The Prince Consort admired the chivalric spirit of the *Idylls*, while the plebeian judgments were taken by the sentimentalism of *The May Queen* or *In the Children's Hospital*. Scientists applauded his acceptance of their theories and discoveries; scholars praised his Virgilian sweetness; the believer found his faith strengthened by *In Memoriam*; while such a questioner and doubter as Henry Sidgwick discovered in three stanzas of that same poem "the indestructible and inalienable minimum of faith which humanity cannot give up." Swinburne is moved to rhapsody (not unusual, to be sure) by the strength and pathos of *Rizpah*; FitzGerald is touched to tears by the truth and tragedy of *The Northern Farmer*.

The inevitable reaction has set in. Critics tell us that Tennyson's poetry is too smooth, too placid, too effeminately graceful, too "Victorian."

"Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,
Dead perfection, no more."

The *Idylls* are Malory reduced to limpid sentimentality; *In Memoriam* is shallow in its philosophy; it does not grapple with the problems it presents but helplessly avoids them. In all such derogatory criticism—and there is too much of it—

the lyrics are never assailed; already their place is secured and they are acknowledged to stand with the highest creations of English genius.

These lyrics are divided readily into distinct groups. The first contains the art lyrics, songs that attract us more by their beauty of melody and description than by their emotion or their thought. They are all so familiar that they are upon our lips as we name them. *Claribel*, pure music, curiously anticipates much of modern poetry that makes its appeal by suggestion, by its half concealed imagery, yet no one has quite imitated its tone; *The Brook* and *Far-Far-Away* are the allegro and adagio of song; *The Owl* is a bit of melody for an Elizabethan Puck. All these lyrics, even the most trifling, are perfect in their form. Writers of lesser rank, when carried away by their imagination or their emotion, frequently attain a perfection of speech that delights and then disappoints us because it so soon is gone. Tennyson shows the marks of his genius in these lyrics of slight import as he does in the deeper poems throbbing with feeling. *The Bugle Song* from *The Princess* is wonderful in its rhythm, in the melody of its vowels and of its rhymes, but more remarkable is the exquisite blending of thought and music. For these horns of elfland, too deep an emotion, too marked a motif would be unsuited, and accordingly Tennyson has expressed that quiet surprise, that tender regret which the echo of distant music brings to us. We have heard this poem so many times that we have ceased to wonder at it, taking it as a matter of course. There is nothing like it in our poetry. Apparently its thought and sentiment could be as well expressed by lyrists of lesser gifts, but if we read Moore's echo song, "How sweet the music echo makes," we find that it has none of Tennyson's magic.

We turn for an example of the art lyric in a more highly developed form to the choric song in *The Lotos-Eaters*. It has the sensuous, luxuriant description of Spenser's ideal

landscapes; it has that vivid beauty of phrase which Keats desired, and yet it is distinctly Tennysonian.

“ Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes;”

“ Let us swear an oath, and keep it with an equal mind,
In the hollow Lotos-land to live and lie reclined
On the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind.”

There is the distinctive note, the range in the modulation that keeps this song with all its appeal to the senses from being over sweet and cloying. With a skill that never deserted him, Tennyson varies his metre, making it rise and fall with the thought, as a tree sways in the wind. Here as elsewhere he uses effectively that device we found in the earliest lyrics, a succession of verses on one rhyme:

“ Here are cool mosses deep,
And thro’ the moss the ivies creep,
And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.”

The gradual lengthening of the lines until the slow movement culminates in the Alexandrine is a stroke of art. In our poetry of the last century, no writer, not even Swinburne, surpassed Tennyson in giving to the poet’s message “The music that wraps it in language beneath and beyond the word.”

Surely we are Platonists enough to agree with Browning that

“ If you get simple beauty and naught else,
You get about the best thing God invents:”

yet we turn more frequently to those lyrics in which the sentiment or the emotion is stronger and the musical element not a whit weaker, to “All along the valley”; “Break, break, break”; *The Miller’s Daughter*; “Move eastward, happy

earth"; "Birds in the high wood calling." What a variety of thought and expression is here! With these poems we include the songs from *The Princess*: "As through the land" and "Home they brought her warrior dead," pathos purified from sentimentality; "Sweet and low," as widely known as were once the old folk ballads, sung more often to-day than any English slumber song; "Ask me no more," in which, as Professor Saintsbury remarks, he challenges the Caroline writers on their own ground;¹ and above all, "Tears, idle tears," the most beautiful unrhymed lyric in the language. There is a most interesting contrast between its sure and firm style and the more elusive qualities of Verlaine's little masterpiece,

" Il pleure dans mon cœur
Comme il pleure dans la ville."

In all these lyrics—and we have not mentioned those exquisite songs from the *Idylls*, "Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel"; "In love, if love be love"; "Free love—free field"; "Ay, ay, O, ay—the winds that bend the brier!"—Tennyson is much more than a consummate artist in language and metre. In a sonnet to Cambridge he once upbraided his Alma Mater:

" You that do profess to teach
And teach us nothing, feeding not the heart."

He himself was free from this charge and back of all these songs is an emotion, communicated directly to us. In any of the fine arts we weary of technique alone, no matter how brilliant. *Les Trophées* by De Heredia is a collection of remarkable sonnets that are purely objective writing. We admire the vividness of the description, the elegance of the style, and then we forget the poems. It is a safe assertion

¹ Cf. Carew's "Ask me no more." There is a reminiscence of Marvell's *Nymph lamenting the death of her fawn* in the line from *Maud*, "You have but fed on the roses and lain in the lilies of life."

that no modern lyrics are so firmly fixed in our memories as are Tennyson's.

We come to the final group of his lyrics in which the emotion and the thought are deeper, songs in which we hear the cry of passion. Here we would consider many of the sections of *In Memoriam*. If we regard this elegy as verse argument, as an attempt to reconcile faith with experience, to justify the ways of God to man, we shall be disappointed in it. If we read it as a series of lyrics, showing not the experiences of love, as do the sonnet sequences, but the moods of grief, we shall find that this work deserves its place among the English classics. Even here the poet shows his wide range in this highest form of the lyric. But this variety is typical of all his work. We turn from the cloistered purity of *Saint Agnes' Eve* to the impassioned love song from *Maud*; from the tranquillity of *Crossing the Bar* to what is the most poignant lyric note in all his writings:

“ O that 'twere possible
After long grief and pain
To find the arms of my true love
Round me once again!

“ A shadow flits before me,
Not thou, but like to thee.
Ah, Christ, that it were possible
For one short hour to see
The souls we loved, that they might tell us
What and where they be!”¹

Here is the simplicity of greatness. These six verses are worthy of Hamlet in his most inspired moments. Commenting upon *The Silent Voices*, Tennyson's last lyric, dictated on his deathbed, Palgrave writes, “Those solemn words, *As sorrowful yet always rejoicing*, give the true key to Alfred

¹ *Maud*.

Tennyson's inmost nature, his life and his poetry."¹ More than any other modern poet he united in his lyrics the joy in life and the sense of its discouragements, its disasters, its tragedies.

For the greater lyric forms, Tennyson's fame might rest on two widely contrasted odes, the youthful *Ode to Memory* and the great dirge for the Iron Duke. The former is rich in its music and in its descriptions, tender in its feeling and its suggestions; the funeral ode has a fitting restraint both in its diction and rhythm, yet this severity of style has caused it to be undervalued. It is direct and straightforward in its appeal; over the grave of this warrior, Tennyson has erected a granite shaft, not a Gothic chapel. A smaller poet would have yielded to the temptation to indulge in the lurid colorings of battle scenes; it is easy to imagine how this subject would have been treated by the eighteenth century writers of Pindaric odes. There is no finer expression of English patriotism than this ode, and its enduring qualities will be more fully recognized as time goes on. Nothing is more characteristic of it than the nobility of its concluding verses. How simply *Paradise Lost* draws to its end. There is no Miltonic organ music, no great picture of the world to which the exiles go, in those last lines:

"They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way."

So this ode shows its kinship with the great works of English genius nowhere more closely than in its ending:

"Speak no more of his renown,
Lay your earthly fancies down,
And in the vast cathedral leave him,
God accept him, Christ receive him!"

¹ *Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics, Second Series*, p. 261.

Robert Browning (1812-1889) is one of the most fascinating and one of the most perplexing figures in all English literature, an inviting personality for the lover of paradox. Over no modern poet are critics so hopelessly at variance. He sings and he stammers; he writes with the simplicity of inspiration and with the awkwardness of one to whom English is a foreign language; he arrives after many twistings and turnings at the goal of his thought and he rushes at it with the speed of the wind; he takes pages to explain a situation, he reveals it in a line; he delights in pure beauty, he revels in the grotesque. These are but a few of the inconsistencies that meet us the moment we approach his work.

From boyhood he seemed destined for verse; as a child he was keenly sensitive to the appeal of music, painting, and poetry. When twelve, he had written a book of poems (it was destroyed) in the style of Byron, and in the following year he fell under the charm of Keats and Shelley. When, however, his first work was published, he spoke in his own language and throughout his whole career his manner was "very strange and new." If the years have made him a less commanding figure, if they have somewhat tarnished parts of the eternal monument he reared, they have destroyed nothing of the beauty and the power of his finest lyrics.

The lyrics contain the very essence of Browning's poetry, for they show his form and expression at their highest level. As there is much poetry in the prose of everyday life, so there is much prose in the verse of every writer—even in Shakespeare, assuredly in Milton. In Browning's longer poems, the prose element is frequently so conspicuous that we wonder why he chose a metrical form for his discussions and analyses. In his lyrics, this prosaic element has vanished yet his distinctive tone, free from admixture of classic or continental influence, remains. It is Browning's misfortune that he did not recognize this, that his lyrics form such a small

part of his work, and it is worth while to discover why such is the case.

No modern poet surpassed Browning in intellectual curiosity or in subtlety of thought. His life was filled with manifold interests. He certainly lived in his own day and generation, yet his imagination revived the past, and characteristically, not the past that attracted Scott and Coleridge, Keats or Shelley, or the Pre-Raphaelite group. All human existence seemed to be his field, and with the greatest novelists, he is attracted by the most widely separated characters, the hero and the knave; the saint and the libertine; the Pope and the peasant girl; Caliban and Mr. Sludge. Moreover his temperament is argumentative; he loves nothing better than to discuss his creations, looking behind their actions to their motives. As Spedding would prove that Lord Bacon had been unfairly condemned, so Browning delighted to take the other side of the case and turn our accepted opinions inside out. This curiosity, this alertness is much more surprising than the calmer introspection of Tennyson, but it by no means implies a greater depth of thought than Tennyson showed.

Now the lyric poet, as we have seen, depends more upon sheer intuition than upon analysis. He may comment upon his emotions and seek to explain them, but in a moment he is caught up again by the surge of his feelings. He convinces, not by argument or discussion, but by the sheer inevitableness of his thought and sensation. His nature will not permit him to question overmuch, and he is more intent upon showing his state of mind than upon explaining it critically. The purely emotional element in *In Memoriam* repeatedly overpowers the poet's attempt to consider the philosophic significance of the mystery of death. Browning's tendency is to peer too deeply in the face of things. He is not content to enjoy the color and perfume of a flower; he would dig to see its roots and what manner of soil produced it. It would

be a difficult matter to discover lyric stanzas finer than certain ones in *Two in the Campagna*, yet this description of imperfect sympathies is not a lyric chiefly because the poet becomes so interested in explaining the lover's attitude.

Again, judged by his work as a whole, Browning did not regard sufficiently the technique of verse. His *Old Pictures in Florence* tells the story; he prefers to highly finished art, pictures crude in coloring and imperfect in drawing because he sees in the lower art a chance for development, something beyond to strive for. In a celebrated statement, he declared that a poet should lay stress on the incidents in the development of a soul and that little else is worth study. Surely the manner of telling these incidents is worthy of the highest study. In reading much of Browning, it is difficult to believe that he was a musician and that at one time he determined to become a composer of songs, for the music of his verse so often disappoints us. Who but Browning would have allowed in the pure melody of *Love among the Ruins*, one of the most splendid achievements in the field of the lyric, such an inexcusable discord as

“Where the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks
Through the chinks”?

Professor Saintsbury has declared that Browning is an audacious but almost invariably a correct prosodist; “he goes often to the very edge, but hardly ever over it.” Such negative praise is not enough; the lyric poet must have music ever ringing in his ears. Browning felt the force in words; to an extraordinary degree, he discovered their emotional content, but not always their melody. It is easy to find exceptions to this, as the verses from *Paracelsus*,

“Heap cassia, sandal-buds and stripes
Of labdanum, and aloe-balls,”

yet this is not his usual style, and the close of the song reads like the work of the neo-Celtic school, in its dreamy sadness:

“ like a cloud
From closet long to silence vowed,
With mothed and drooping arras hung,
Mouldering her lute and books among,
As when a queen, long dead, was young.”

His poems please us more often because of the nobility of their thought and feeling than by their workmanship.

Browning's lyrics, then, are comparatively few in number, but these few are most precious. If we look for their distinctive traits, we remark first of all their superb sense of movement. As Swinburne observed, much of Browning's obscurity comes from the rapidity of his thought; we can not follow him in his haste. The tide of his emotion is never a tide that moving seems asleep and, in lyrical writing, this is an excellence rather than a defect. What a splendid rush there is in his cavalier tunes. No knight-at-arms eager for battle ever sang a more ringing refrain than:

“ King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in Hell's despite now,
King Charles!”

Such a song would have been worth many regiments. In the *Last Ride Together*, we hear the very beat of the horses' feet in the marvellous rhythm, while the thoughts hurry through the lover's mind as quickly as the landscape rushes by. In “The year's at the spring,” how the song leaps to its triumphant conclusion,

“ God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world!”

In *Prospice*, in the *Epilogue to Asolando*, where we expect a quieter movement because of the opening phrases,

“ At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,
When you set your fancies free,”

what an onward march there is. *Love among the Ruins* is the most beautiful of all his lyrics. Using a metre as musical as that of the *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* (though utterly different in its effect), Browning draws in the opening verses as quiet a picture as did Gray:

“ Where the quiet-colored end of evening smiles
Miles and miles
On the solitary pastures where our sheep
Half-asleep
Tinkle homeward through the twilight, stray or stop
As they crop—”

Yet after such a prelude we hear the tread of armies, we see the chariot race, and the poem ends in a splendid burst of feeling as fine in its effect as Blake's plate of the soul reunited to the body. Whatever may be said of Browning's verse, it certainly throbs with life. It is the spirit, and no technical excellence, that gives the value to his patriotic “Nobly, nobly Cape Saint Vincent to the North-west died away.”

We have said nothing of nature descriptions in his lyrics. As we might infer, they are sharply and precisely drawn, no imagined scenes but bits of real life—the campagna, the sea coast “to the farther South,” or England in May. *De Gustibus* and *Home-Thoughts, from Abroad* show the clearness of his vision; where other poets but draw details, he gives us a whole country in a few lines. It is not, however, in his treatment of nature but of love that Browning's lyrics reach their highest point.

The poet's philosophy of life is summed up in his line “Love is best,” and to represent the emotions, the idealism, the happiness, the despair of a lover was his chief lyric gift. Could there be a better way of measuring the artificiality

of the followers of Petrarch or the courtier poets of "either Charles's days" than by comparing their gallant compliments with Browning's *Summum Bonum*, *My Star*, or the songs from *In a Gondola*? The delight in the "wild joy of living" felt in all these lyrics has led many a poet into the quagmires, but it brought Browning to the heights. His women are flesh and blood, no pale abstractions, but he is as much of an idealist as any poet we have discussed. The love he sings is a union of heart and mind; it is a moulding force; it is the final touch that crowns man's life, if not in this world, surely in the next. "Let us be unashamed of soul," he cries, and he follows his own injunctions. There is a nobility in these poems that affects us as strongly as their emotional power; it is conspicuously seen in the calmness and courage with which his men and women who sing these songs meet disappointment and death.

If a study of literature teaches anything, it cautions us to beware of trusting the praise or blame a poet receives from his contemporaries. Browning has suffered equally from neglect and from over-enthusiastic admiration. Whatever may be his ultimate fate, it is impossible to believe that these lyrics will ever lose their freshness, their vigor, their appeal to what is highest in man and woman.

II

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) was the son of Frances Polidori and Gabriele Rossetti. His father, a man of letters and the custodian of ancient bronzes in the Museo Borbonico at Naples, was an ardent patriot. His songs, directed against the tyranny of Ferdinand I, brought him in such danger that he left his home and took refuge in London in 1824. Frances Polidori had an English mother, but her father was an Italian litterateur who had published a translation of Milton and who had been secretary to the poet Alfieri.

Though the traditions of his family pointed him towards a literary career, Rossetti had determined from boyhood to become a painter. Beginning his art studies in 1842, he became the pupil of Ford Maddox Brown in 1848. This same year, with Millais and Holman Hunt, he founded the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood—a protest against the conventional technique, the trifling sentimentality, and the lack of imagination in English art. It was the belief of the men who formed this group that the very perfection of Raphael's style had tended to destroy originality in modern painting. They affirmed that the modern artist should assert his own individuality and paint objects as he saw them not as he thought Raphael would have seen them. "They did not take the earlier painters as a model, but they wished to revert to the principles of an artistic age when a strong and dominating tradition was not at work, but when painters developed art on their own lines with sturdy fidelity, masculine individuality, and serious intention."¹

A description or criticism of the paintings of this school, to say nothing of Rossetti's work, would lead us too far afield, but we certainly must mention one undertaking of the brotherhood, *The Germ*. This was a monthly magazine, founded to defend and illustrate the Pre-Raphaelite theories of art. It was short lived; only four numbers were published. They were enough to make it forever famous; the second contained *The Blessed Damsel*, the last, six of Rossetti's sonnets on pictures.

In 1851 Rossetti became engaged to Elizabeth Siddal, a girl of extraordinary beauty, whose face appears in many of his paintings and who inspired a work greater than all his canvasses—his sonnet sequence, *The House of Life*. Not until 1860 did his means permit him to marry her and within two years she died suddenly from an overdose of laudanum. In an agony of grief Rossetti buried with her the sole manu-

¹ A. C. Benson, *Rossetti*, London, 1904, p. 20.

script of his poems. In 1869 her grave was opened, the manuscript recovered, and in the following year the poems were published.

The sonnets contained in this volume establish Rossetti's position among our greatest lyrists. Palgrave includes *The blessed Damozel* in his *Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics*, yet it hardly lies within our province. We feel this when we compare it with the poem that inspired it, Poe's *Raven*. The refrain, the inner rhymes of the *Raven* instantly suggest music; Rossetti's masterpiece with its characteristic mingling of the spiritual and the sensuous, with its definite imagery, with its vivid coloring, suggests a painting:

"She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven."

When we remember how thoroughly familiar he was with Italian poetry, we are surprised to find in his work so little that has song quality, for he wrote no madrigals or ballate. Certainly there are a number of exquisite lyrics scattered through his poems, *Sudden Light*, *Insomnia*, *The Woodspurge*, *An old Song ended*. Although they have not the artistic significance of the sonnets, yet they bear the stamp of his genius.

We perceive that Rossetti is a supreme master of technique the instant we read the opening sonnet in *The House of Life*. We quote but its octave:

"A sonnet is a moment's monument,—
Memorial from the soul's eternity
To one dead deathless hour. Look that it be,
Whether for lustral rite or dire portent,
Of its own arduous fulness reverent:
Carve it in ivory or in ebony,
As Day or Night may rule; and let Time see
Its flowering crest imperaled and orient."

No English sonneteer had attained such a style; its effect is as unique and original as the impression *The Blessed Damozel* makes upon us. Rossetti said that Drayton's

"Since there's no help, come, let us kiss and part,—
Nay, I have done, you get no more of me;"

was the finest sonnet in the language, yet his own style is as far removed as possible from such a simple, monosyllabic diction. Many of the most beautiful of the Elizabethan sonnets are so fluent in their expression that they read like inspired improvisation; the flowers of speech that adorn them are gathered in any garden. In the majority of Rossetti's sonnets, every line seems curiously and exquisitely wrought. However, they are much more than carvings in ivory or ebony, to use his own figure, for we feel in them all the most poignant emotion. His lines have a new note; the ear is filled with the languorous tones of long drawn out chords:

"What dawn-pulse at the heart of heaven, or last
Incarnate flower of culminating day,—
What marshalled marvels on the skirts of May,
Or song full-quiured, sweet June's encomiast;"

or

"Sweet dimness of her loosened hair's downfall
About thy face; her sweet hands round thy head
In gracious fostering union garlanded;
Her tremulous smiles; her glances' sweet recall
Of love; her murmuring sighs memorial;"¹

William Sharp considers Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Rossetti our three greatest sonneteers, and that Rossetti is supreme in "weight and volume of sound. As a wind-swayed pine seems literally to shake off music from its quivering branches, so do his sonnets throb with and disperse deep-sounding harmonies."²

¹ *Beauty's Pageant; Love-Sweetness.*

² *Sonnets of this Century*, London, 1886, p. lxxlii.

The sonnets in *The House of Life* tell of the overpowering appeal of beauty; of the ardor of love; of the desolation wrought by death;—old themes yet new ones in Rossetti's hands. As we have seen, the predominating strain in his blood was Italian, and these sonnets have little of English tradition in them. We have quoted Browning's "Let us be unashamed of soul," yet Browning is more restrained than Rossetti. Donne is at times frankly sensual yet in a few lines he shows more of the intellectual side of love, more of the union of two minds, than we discover in all Rossetti's sequence. Although he declared that it was never his wish to assert that the body is greater than the soul one does not get that impression from his verse. He appeals insistently even morbidly to the senses; the very love letter he receives from his mistress seems warmed by her hand, shadowed by her hair, shaken by her breath. We remember that the Elizabethan Platonists worshipped beauty and celebrated human loveliness, but they made a clear distinction between the body and the spirit. They never forgot the greater beauty of which the earthly is but a type or symbol; Rossetti lives for the present moment. How far removed from Spenser's *Hymn to Beauty* are Rossetti's lines:

" Lady, I fain would tell how evermore
Thy soul I know not from thy body, nor
Thee from myself, neither our love from God."¹

When the Elizabethan lyrists praise physical beauty—Lodge's *Rosalynde* is a good instance—they are like men admiring some wonderful statue bathed in sunlight. Browning's lovers meet under the open sky in

" The champaign with its endless fleece
Of feathery grasses everywhere!
Silence and passion, joy and peace,
An everlasting wash of air;"

¹ *Heart's Hope.*

but Rossetti takes us to a dim room, where we are overpowered by the incense burning at a shrine to Venus Victrix, or by the heavy fragrance of flowers scattered on the floor. Robert Buchanan's bitter attack on Rossetti in his diatribe entitled *The Fleshly School of Poetry* was unjust; on the other hand there is truth in Patmore's strictures. He considered, writes Gosse, that Rossetti above all other modern writers had been granted an insight into spiritual mysteries, but though the ark of passion had been placed in his hands, he had used it chiefly to serve his curiosity, and we might add, to delight his artistic sense.¹

Although the *House of Life*, taken as a whole, cloyes the taste; although its intense worship of beauty may antagonise the reader as do parts of Crashaw's poetry, it contains sonnets that are unsurpassed in any literature. We turn from the despair of *Lost Days* to *The One Hope*; from *The Birth-Bond*, whose sestet contains that faultless description of a predestined love, to *Silent Noon*, so vividly written that one almost feels the calm of mid-day; from the pure idealism of *Soul's Beauty* to the fearful reality of death in *Without Her*. If we compare the imagery and the passionate abandonment to grief of this sonnet with the restrained sorrow of Milton's "Methought I saw my late espoused saint," we see at a glance the essential difference between the classic and the romantic styles.

But Rossetti was much more than a notable painter and a great sonneteer; he was a dominating personality. His spirit impressed itself on contemporary poetry—plainly in the early poems of Morris and Swinburne, less apparently but quite unmistakably in the writings of many smaller poets. Keats had shown the world the beauty of classic myth and the loveliness of nature; Rossetti found in beauty the white heat of emotion, an enchantment that enthralled the senses. It is little wonder that a genius so original, so

¹ Edmund Gosse, *Coventry Patmore*, N. Y., 1905, p. 175.

forceful in expression should have set aflame the imaginations of the two poets whom we now reach in our study.

William Morris (1834-1896), "poet, artist, manufacturer, and socialist," felt from childhood the fascination of the Middle Ages. He delighted to visit the old churches about his Essex home, making rubbings from the inscriptions on their tombs or studying their carvings. There is a certain period in the life of every boy when he must have his soldier suit; Morris, true to his tastes, had a suit of armor.

When Morris entered Exeter College, Oxford, he looked forward to taking orders, as did Burne-Jones, a fellow collegian and firm friend, but the call of art proved too strong for them. In 1855, on a vacation trip to France, they both decided that they were not destined for the priesthood; Burne-Jones was to become a painter and Morris an architect. This devotion to art led them directly to Rossetti and for two years Morris was his ardent disciple, vainly endeavoring to make of himself a painter. His first important work was not a picture but a book, *The Defence of Guenevere and other Poems* (1858).

This volume was dedicated to Rossetti and throughout it his influence is plainly felt. Here are the Middle Ages with their fair women, their combats, their tragedies, but above all, with their pomp and pageantry. These are the poems of a painter; on every page we see the love of color:

"Gold on her head, and gold on her feet,
And gold where the hems of her kirtle meet,
And a golden girdle around my sweet;—
Ah! qu'elle est belle, La Marguerite."¹

On the purely artistic side, in the choice of subjects and in the manner of treatment, we see Rossetti, yet the two men were different in temperamnt. Morris writes objectively; in this book he sees more than he feels and he nowhere dis-

¹ *The Eve of Crecy.*

closes that intense personal emotion which was to mark the sonnets of *The House of Life*. Accordingly the lyrical element is slight in this first volume. Its best poems are dramatic narration, *The Haystack in the Floods*, *King Arthur's Tomb*, *Sir Peter Harpdon's End*; the few lyrics, *The Gilliflower of Gold*, *The Eve of Crecy*, *Two Red Roses across the Moon*, *Sir Giles' War-Song*, *Praise of my Lady*, and *In Prison*, are slight in texture, frankly artificial, and show little of his genius.

In his next volume, Morris appears as the follower of Chaucer and indeed he is his greatest disciple. The opening of the seventeenth book of *The Life and Death of Jason*, (1867) proclaims his allegiance:

“ Would that I
 Had but some portion of that mastery
 That from the rose-hung lanes of woody Kent
 Through these five hundred years such songs have sent
 To us, who, meshed within this smoky net
 Of unrejoicing labor, love them yet.
 And thou, O Master!—Yea, my Master still,
 Whatever feet have scaled Parnassus' hill,
 Since like thy measures, clear, and sweet, and strong,
 Thames' stream scarce fettered bore the bream along
 Unto the bastioned bridge, his only chain,—
 O Master, pardon me, if yet in vain
 Thou art my Master, and I fail to bring
 Before men's eyes the image of the thing
 My heart is filled with.”

The poet's style has been transformed; it is no longer ornate and over-wrought but “clear and sweet,” if not always strong. It has not, however, become more lyrical and this admiration for Chaucer, expressed with even more feeling in the Envoi to *The Earthly Paradise*, would not turn him towards song. He is to be a teller of tales.

Throughout his narrative poems Morris does introduce a few lyrics. In *Jason*, there are several, written in octosyllabics, of which the best is:

“ I know a little garden close
Set thick with lily and red rose,
Where I would wander if I might
From dewy dawn to dewy night,
And have one with me wandering.”

yet none of them have distinction. In his prose romances we find songs; *The Roots of the Mountains* has at least one that deserves remembrance:

“ Green and green is thy garment growing
Over thy blossoming limbs beneath;
Up o’er our feet rise the blades of thy sowing,
Pierced are our hearts with thine odorous breath.

“ But where art thou wending, thou new-comer?
Hurrying on to the Courts of the Sun?
Where art thou now in the House of the Summer?
Told are thy days and thy deed is done.

“ Spring has been here for us that are living
After the days of Winter’s fear;
Here in our hands is the wealth of her giving,
The Love of the Earth, and the Light of the Year.”¹

The gleanings, however, is scanty, though we search in his morality, *Love is Enough*, or in his renderings of the Northern Sagas.

The case is altered when we turn to *The Earthly Paradise*, (1868-1870). Even here, in all the forty-two thousand lines, the lyrics are but few yet they are extremely beautiful. The duo in the tale of *Ogier the Dane* has the simplicity and the freshness of the Elizabethans:

¹ Chapter XXIX.

“ In the white-flowered hawthorn brake,
Love, be merry for my sake;
Twine the blossoms in my hair,
Kiss me where I am most fair—
Kiss me, love! for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death?”

The Noël in *The Land East of the Sun* has caught the spirit of our earliest lyrics, except that the refrain seems affected:

“ In an ox-stall this night we saw
 The snow in the street and the wind on the door.
A babe and a maid without a flaw,
 Minstrels and maids, stand forth on the floor.

The love song in *Accontius and Cydippe* has charm and music; the one in *He Who Never Laughed Again* has more emotion than Morris usually cares to show; the stanzas that the “sweet-voiced choir of unknown, unseen folk” sing in *Cupid and Psyche* are tender in feeling and beautiful in expression, yet none of these would be ranked among the great English lyrics.

To give variety and to separate into groups the tales of the *Earthly Paradise*, Morris composed twelve lyric interludes, one for each month. They are placed far apart, with long stretches of verse between, but they should be detached from their context and printed side by side since they form a lyric cycle that for variety, beauty and pathos, ranks with the best work of the nineteenth century. Each lyric consists of three stanzas in Chaucer’s favorite rhyme royal. Like the Chaucerian imitators of the fifteenth century, Morris was too prolix, but in these short songs he has restrained himself, with the result that these lyrics are finer in their workmanship and more intense in their feeling than any other poems in this volume. These songs of the months portray with a skill that recalls Rossetti the aspects of the changing seasons, yet they are not mere descriptive poems,

for through them all runs the poet's lament for change and death. He sees the inevitable end even in the promise of April:

“When summer brings the lily and the rose,
She brings us fear; her very death she brings
Hid in her anxious heart, the forge of woes;
And, dull with fear, no more the mavis sings.”

In the songs of fall and winter we seem to hear the old strains of “Wynter wakeneth all my care,” but sung with the shadings and the intensity of modern art. In his writings Morris did not follow the injunction of Sidney's verse to look in his heart and write; he looked back on the myths and legends of the past. In these few lyrics, there is more than mere objective art, and as Alfred Noyes points out, “many of them are personal utterances—glimpses of Morris's own life, recollections of golden afternoons on the river above Oxford, when he was composing his great poem or reading it aloud to his wife and friends”.¹

“O June, O June, that we desired so,
Wilt thou not make us happy on this day?
Across the river thy soft breezes blow
Sweet with the scent of beanfields far away,
Above our heads rustle the aspens gray,
Calm is the sky with harmless clouds beset,
No thought of storm the morning vexes yet.”

If we turn from this placid mood to the dejection of *November*, expressed with an intensity that recalls Shelley, we find a range of expression that makes us regret the poet's devotion to the epic.

Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909) had no long and painful struggle to win popular recognition. His *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) and *Poems and Ballads* (1866),

¹ Alfred Noyes, *William Morris*, London, 1908, p. 79.

a volume that owes much to Rossetti, astonished the age by the remarkable originality and brilliancy of the verse as well as by the audacity of theme and treatment. He won instantly partisans and opponents and was alternately extolled and traduced. For nearly half a century he was a commanding figure; he steadily produced lyrics, verse tragedy and romance, prose criticism, yet he was never a writer whose language and thoughts entered into the life of the times. We can not attribute this to the over-sweetness, to the sensual tone of part of his early work, nor to his avowed hostility towards church and creed, which offended many, for in some of his very greatest achievements these traits of style and thought never appear. We can not say that his style is too difficult or his thought too obscure for the plebeian judgment when Browning has become popular. Without accepting Tolstoi's theory of art, we may at least believe that there is a defect in the work of a gifted poet who has failed to sing his way into our common speech and thought. We do not complain that there are no trite quotations, brilliant half truths, or soft sentiments in his writings, but that even avowed lovers of English poetry have at the best a most superficial acquaintance with his verse. Socrates was proud that he had drawn philosophy down from the heights to the home and to the market place; the greatest musicians, Beethoven and Wagner, appeal to no small circle of the elect but to the most unskilled listeners; why does not Swinburne stand with Tennyson and Browning, and even with Arnold, in attracting all sorts and conditions of readers?

The first impression that Swinburne makes on the reader is one of unqualified admiration for his marvelous technique. He surpasses every Victorian poet excepting Tennyson in his instinctive perception of the music latent in our language, and he gains many effects which Tennyson never approached. The consummate ease with which he used the most difficult rhythms and rhyme schemes; the impetuous melody, or we

may call it, the full chorus of his verse, never faltering, never lapsing into discords, is one of the miracles of English literature. Thoroughly familiar with the poetry of Greece, Italy, and France, he seems to have brought something foreign into his own lines. We can not point out what it is; the heart of it all is English; and yet we hear his poetry with something of the sensation we feel in listening to a foreign tongue. Generally when a poet strikes a new path for himself, he astonishes by mere innovation; it is the beauty of Swinburne's innovations in English rhythms that makes him conspicuous among modern writers.

He seemed to be master of all styles. A revolutionist, with Hugo as his ideal, he wrote the most uncontrolled invectives against the tyranny of Austria and Russia. He was attracted by the roundel, one of the most exquisite of French verse forms, and his poems of childhood written in that measure have a surpassing grace and delicacy. More than any Victorian poet he admired the grandeur and elevation of the Greek ode, yet he feels equally the pathos of the simple Jacobite ballads and imitates them, or rather, becomes himself a Jacobite and writes them. No description can do his style justice, and we need illustrations. What a haunting music there is in his *Adieux à Marie Stuart*:

“ Queen, for whose house my fathers fought,
With hopes that rose and fell,
Red star of boyhood's fiery thought,
Farewell.

“ Queen once of Scots and ever of ours
Whose sires brought forth for you
Their lives to strew your way like flowers,
Adieu.”

Could Tennyson better the melody of *A Match*:

“ If love were what the rose is,
And I were like the leaf”?

From these simpler forms, Swinburne's music rises higher and higher as an organist builds up his tone, drawing stop after stop. We go from the *Laus Veneris* stanza struck off at white heat, Meredith tells us, after reading FitzGerald's *Omar Khayyám*,

" Ah yet would God this flesh of mine might be
Where air might wash and long leaves cover me,
Where tides of grass break into foam of flowers,
Or where the wind's feet shine along the sea."

to the more rapid measure of *Dolores*:

" On sands by the storm never shaken,
Nor wet from the washing of tides;
Nor by foam of the waves overtaken,
Nor winds that the thunder bestrides;
But red from the print of thy paces,
Made smooth for the world and its lords,
Ringed round with a flame of fair faces,
And splendid with swords."

What variety in the metres of *The Garden of Proserpine*, the *Hymn to Proserpine*, and the choruses of *Atalanta*, his greatest lyrical achievement! He never surpassed his own

" When the hounds of Spring are on winter's traces,
The mother of months in meadow or plain
Fills the shadows and windy places
With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain."

We go from his finest elegy, *Ave atque Vale*, to his great odes *To Athens* and *The Armada*, which he rightly said would decide his rank as a lyric poet in the higher sense of the term. What a range from such a lyric as *A Child's Laughter* to the ocean swells of the *Armada* ode:

- " 'They that ride over ocean wide with hempen bridle and horse
of tree,'
How shall they in the darkening day of wrath and anguish
and fear go free?
How shall these who have curbed the seas not feel his bridle
who made the sea?
- " Mast on mast as a tower goes past, and sail by sail as a cloud's
wing spread;
Fleet by fleet, as the throngs whose feet keep time with death
in his dance of dread;
Galleons dark as the helmsman's bark of old that ferried to
hell the dead."

Surely there must be whole pages of such writing that stamp themselves indelibly on the memory, and yet—one may easily try the experiment—these poems do not stay with us as the lyrics of Shelley and Tennyson that almost memorize themselves.

In the case of Swinburne, facility of expression actually harmed his work. His poetry is often linked sweetness too long drawn out. Even while the reader is admiring the vigorous sweep of the rhythm, the beauty of a phrase, he finds himself unconsciously fingering the pages to see how far he is from the end. *By the North Sea* is a typical piece of writing; it contains many beautiful, even superb stanzas, yet it would be much more effective if shorter. Again and again in Swinburne's work we find not a progression of thought or emotion, but merely a progression in the harmonies of verse. His melodic gift misleads him. Carried along by the music of words, he can not come quickly to his climax; it is for this reason, chiefly, that he never succeeded as a dramatist. *Atalanta in Calydon* followed the Greek ideas of tragedy; restraint was virtually forced upon him with the result that the poem is his masterpiece.

In the dedicatory epistle to the first collected edition of his poems, he speaks of his art as having its material more

in common with a musician's than a sculptor's medium. He tells us that "there is no music in verse which has not in it sufficient fullness and ripeness of meaning, sufficient adequacy of emotion or of thought," to abide the test of honest criticism. While this is true in part, it is also a fact that much of the finest verse appeals to the mind's eye as much as to the ear. The sea is one of Swinburne's chief sources of inspiration; his rhythms have caught something of the sweep and surge of its waves, yet the lines that bring the ocean before our eyes do not come from his poems. If we compare a stanza from *In Guernsey* with three lines from Tennyson's *Eagle*, we illustrate the point:

" Across and along, as the bay's breadth opens, and o'er us
Wild autumn exults in the wind, swift rapture and strong
Impels us, and broader the wide waves brighten before us
Across and along."

This is felt rather than perceived. We turn to Tennyson:

" *The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;*
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls."

Italy inspired him, but he has left us no such word painting of the South as we get in a few lines of *De Gustibus* or the opening stanzas of *By the Fire Side*. He writes much of the earth, but not as one who treads on it; he sees it as from a cloud or as one

" blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world."

There is generally a vagueness in his pictures; he was incapable of such a definite and satisfying piece of word painting as Rossetti's *Silent Noon*. This is a serious defect. There is a profound significance in the myth of the giant Antæus

whose strength was replenished each time he set foot upon the ground.

There is a lack of human interest in much of his work. The *Armada* ode is a magnificent composition, entirely worthy of its great subject, yet we turn more frequently to Tennyson's song of the bravery of Elizabethan seamen because the ballad of the last fight of the *Revenge* shows us what the great ode does not—a man fighting against overwhelming odds. No one can be insensible to the tenderness and pathos of Swinburne's poems on a baby's death, yet how much more poignant is that little poem *Dora*, by Brown, the Manx poet. Swinburne's verses do not bring death home to us; Brown's poem awakens almost a sense of personal loss. There are many stanzas of impressive description in *By the North Sea*, but we do not find the peasant or the sailor on the shores of Swinburne's ocean. The interest in *Robinson Crusoe* begins not with the pictures of a desolate coast, but when a human footprint is seen on the beach.

Critics have emphasized the fact that Swinburne is the direct inheritor of Shelley's revolutionary ideas and of his love of liberty. Much like the work of the older poet are such lines as:

“Yea, one thing stronger and more high than God,
Which if man had not, then should God not be:
And that was Liberty.”¹

yet Shelley in his lyrics comes closer to our experiences than does his successor. There is too much of the lofty style and too little of human nature's daily food. Though he writes much of sky and sea, Swinburne appears at times as a recluse, as one who lived in the world of books, in a world created by his own imagination. It is because he did not lay hold on life that Swinburne will never be ranked with the greatest Victorian poets.

¹ *Thalassius*.

III

We complained that the intellectual element is too much lacking in Swinburne's work; this is the last charge that could be brought against the two Oxford poets whose writings are the most evident and most attractive manifestation of the reaction against the Tractarian movement. Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-1861), a favorite pupil of Dr. Arnold of Rugby; a scholar of Balliol and fellow of Oriel, voluntarily left Oxford because he could not believe in the religious tenets which officially he was supposed to hold. He travelled in Italy, spent a few weeks in America, and was for a brief period employed in the education department of the Privy Council. He did not in his writings fulfill his brilliant intellectual promise; indeed Palgrave, in his sympathetic account of the poet, suggests that he lived rather than wrote his poem.¹ His winning personality, so adequately praised in Matthew Arnold's *Thyrsis*, never fully recorded itself.

Clough was a thinker rather than a singer, a moralist rather than an artist. In the greater part of his writing he did not pay sufficient heed to technique. His two sonnets are feebly expressed; the hexameter is used with only tolerable success in his *Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*; while his lyrics frequently offend the ear with trivial and even discordant sounds. To tag his rhymes he indulges in constructions so awkward that the expression becomes inharmonious and the thought obscure.

"Heaven guide, the cup be not, as chance may be,
To some vain mate given up as soon as tasted!
No, nor on thee be wasted,
Thou trifler, Poesy!"²

he exclaims, and he clearly neglected his art.

¹ F. T. Palgrave, *The Poetical Works of Clough, The Muses' Library*, London, Prefatory Memoir.

² P. 11.

In the content of his verse, likewise, art counts for but little. Both Arnold and Palgrave testify to Clough's great love of nature; to the latter critic, he seemed to have inherited a double portion of Wordsworth's spirit. In a *Lecture Room*, a poem that certainly recalls Wordsworth's "One impulse from a vernal wood," decries "vain Philosophy" that leaves the spirit dead:

"Unto thy broken cisterns wherefore go,
While from the secret treasure-depths below,
Fed by the skiey shower,
And clouds that sink and rest on hill-tops high,
Wisdom at once, and Power,
Are welling, bubbling forth, unseen, incessantly?"¹

yet Clough does not delight enough in picturing nature for its own sake. In the *Bothie*, that refreshing vacation romance filled with the humor, the vigor, the idealism of youth, there are many graceful passages picturing mountain and glen, shaded pool and foaming water-fall, yet less gifted poets have surpassed his descriptions of the beauty of earth. What Clough saw chiefly was the world of the spirit.

Few English poets have been so deeply religious as Clough; in his most characteristic work the moral consciousness reigned supreme. Living at a time when scientific thought came in conflict with traditional religious belief, he felt it his solemn obligation to discover what truth is. This was the eager quest of his life. Intellectual honesty forbade him to accept the tenets of orthodoxy; the solutions offered by the church for the never settled problems of human life and destiny seemed to him insincere or inadequate. On the other hand, he was never confident of his own conclusions:

"We! what do we see? each a space
Of some few yards before his face;
Does that the whole wide plan explain?"²

¹ P. 4.

² P. 55.

With Arnold, he was a strange mixture of the sceptic and one who would fain believe. As Professor Walker pointed out, both poets felt strongly the attraction of the old faith and the deepest tones in their poetry "are struck by just this emotional sympathy with a creed which their intellect compels them to reject."¹

" Ah yet, when all is thought and said,
The heart still overrules the head;"²

writes Clough, yet he dares not trust his emotions. He was determined to walk by sight, yet felt the necessity of faith, and the result was uncertainty and doubt.

" O Good and Great,
In whom in this bedarkened state
I fain am struggling to believe,"³

shows him in a typical mood.

In discussing Byron, we noticed that his mood is remote from our modern attitude of mind. So must we reluctantly say of this poet whose world was infinitely removed from Byron's. Whatever we may boast of the present age, we can not say that the philosophy of religion greatly occupies it. Our artistic sense has been highly developed; we love nature and live out of doors; we are curious for new sensations, bold to the point of rashness, restless to the point of vagrancy, but thinking too precisely on the spiritual event is not one of our traits. On such matters, we prefer not to think at all or to let some one else think for us. The average reader is not torn by what Clough calls his "mortal moral strife," for he is satisfied with an attempt to observe the more obvious commands of the decalogue. Clough frequently compares a man to a ship at sea, ignorant of its course; we

¹ Hugh Walker, *The Literature of the Victorian Era*, Cambridge, 1910, p. 453.

² P. 50.

³ P. 9.

know precisely for what port we are embarked. He speaks of the mystery of the world; for us the problem has resolved itself into a purely physical one which science is speedily settling. Even when we abandon our materialistic vantage ground and meet Clough, we wish him to fight his way out. He has said

“ ’Tis better to have fought and lost,
Than never to have fought at all,”

and while we assent to this in a general way, we enjoy a victory. Surely the call of the world should be to something more than

“ To finger idly some old Gordian knot,
Unskilled to sunder, and too weak to cleave,
And with much toil attain to half believe.”¹

Such a poet sings to a small audience.

We have said that Clough was not confident of his own conclusions, yet he did attain to what we may call a residuum of faith. There are two distinct phases of thought in his poetry. In the first, as our quotations have shown, he is struggling to believe. His questionings lead only to despondency:

“ But whoso ponders, weighs, and measures,
She calls her torturers up to goad
With spur and scourges on the road.”²

He can find no abiding place and asks what home has one “whose ship is driving o’er the driving sea.” From this state of mind, he emerges into the dawn if not the sunlight of belief:

¹ P. 60.

² P. 46.

" Hope evermore and believe, O man, for e'en as thy thought
 So are the things that thou see'st; e'en as thy hope and
 belief.

* * * * *

" Go from the east to the west, as the sun and the stars direct
 thee,

Go with the girdle of man, go and encompass the earth.

Not for the gain of the gold; for the getting, the hoarding, the
 having,

But for the joy of the deed: but for the Duty to do.

* * * * *

" Go with the sun and the stars, and yet evermore in thy spirit

Say to thyself: It is good: yet is there better than it.

This that I see is not all, and this that I do is but little;

Nevertheless it is good, though there is better than it."¹

Our soul becomes entranced by what he calls the "bare conscience of the better thing." The seekers for truth will at last be united; though we find at morning that our ship has parted from the others during the night, we shall all meet in the harbor. This optimism, quiet when compared with Browning's, reaches its most convincing expression in Clough's masterpiece, "Say not, the struggle naught avail-eth." There is a more reticent faith in his finest religious lyrics, "What we, when face to face we see," "O thou whose image in the shrine," and "O only Source of all our light," in which every syllable is deeply felt and pondered. These are poems composed on the battlefield, and they strike home. George Herbert, too, went through the valley of despair, yet it was his faith in himself that was shaken, not his faith in God. Clough pushed his doubts much further, and accordingly the subjective element in his poems seems deeper. It is this spirit, rather than their melody, that brings the poems we have just cited within our field of study. Even in "O

stream descending to the sea," or "Put forth thy leaf, thou lofty plane," it is not song that we hear, but the lyric cry.

The poems of Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) were slow in winning their way; indeed, his first two volumes, appearing anonymously in 1849 and 1852, were so little appreciated that they were withdrawn from publication. To-day the opinion is frequently expressed—and it is probably a correct one—that though the greater part of his career was devoted to his critical essays, his verse is destined to outlive his prose. Certainly he offers in his poetry something that no other Victorian singer has given us.

In the 1853 edition of his poems, Arnold published a critical preface that plainly foreshadowed his later writing. He discloses in it his ideal of poetry. His admiration is all for the "severe and scrupulous self-restraint of the ancients"; for their noble simplicity and calm pathos. He believes their grandeur which so impresses him consists in their "unity and profoundness of moral impression." Modern poetry is prone to be incomplete, beautiful in detached passages, and hence it lacks art; its interests are too often temporary ones, it does not strike deep enough into human experience.¹ If to this conception of the superlative importance of art and of the intellectual content of verse, we link his famous precept that poetry should be a criticism, that is, an interpretation of life, and primarily of the life of the spirit, we are prepared to find in Arnold's own lyrics a chastened style, thought rather than passion, analysis rather than imaginative intuition. Such indeed is the case.

The poet was brought up in the tenets of the Church of England. His father, Arnold of Rugby, was a man of deep faith who exerted on his pupils a profound religious influence, for he never doubted that he could point out to his scholars the way of salvation. His son had no such confidence, for, despite the beauty of the old creed and its appeal to the finest

¹ *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, Oxford, 1909, pp. 12-16.

emotions, he felt it outworn and yet knew nothing that could take its place. It was inevitable that this temper of mind should breed unhappiness and that his most impressive poems, such as *Dover Beach* or the *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse*, should be elegies on our loss of faith.

It would appear that the safety for a man of Arnold's temperament would lie in raising the banner of a more liberal and rational belief, and in becoming the militant apostle of a new faith:

"Hail to the courage which gave
Voice to its creed, ere the creed
Won consecration from Time."¹

In his verse at least he can not do this. He is not sure enough of his position; he is sick of asking, "what I am and what I ought to be." For this poet,

"Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head,"²

there would seem to be no creed but pessimism. He tells Fausta that our vaunted life is one long funeral; we are on a dark plain where ignorant armies clash by night; we hear no voice to inspire us, for the kings of modern thought are dumb. Our bane is a faltering course:

"Oh that past times would give our day,
Joined to its clearness, of their force!"

We may try to lose ourselves in "action's dizzying eddy whirled," but we merely rush in vain over the whole earth,

"And never once possess our soul
Before we die.

All this is urged with intense feeling, yet with dignity. The voice of the poet's muse is never shrill; there is no hectic

¹ P. 277.

² P. 272.

flush on her cheek as she gazes on modern life with "unwavering, deep disdain."

Utterly removed from the querulous complaint of disappointed pride or ambition, such writing should bring us to a profound melancholy, yet such is not the case. Though we may assent to many of his strictures, why do not these poems leave us disheartened at the tragedy of life? The answer seems to be that here, as in so much of his writing, the emotional appeal is lacking in force; in his own words, he is

"Never by passion quite possessed
And never quite benumbed by the world's sway."

What Arnold said of Wordsworth is not true of himself, "He spake, and loos'd our hearts in tears," and accordingly while the effect of reading Arnold's despondent moods may be disquieting, it is never discouraging. He does indeed prick the iridescent bubble of our self-complacency, of our irrational optimism, yet he rarely wounds us. The scholar's mind, and Arnold was a scholar-poet, has a certain aloofness from the drama of life. Despite his sincerity, we feel that he stands on the hill of truth and watches the fighting below; that from the shore, he marks the sea of faith recede, and that he is not the swimmer, borne out by the undertow, struggling to make the land. In the *Hayswater Boat*, Arnold pictures a battered skiff, with its moldering oars, caught by the tide and sent drifting aimlessly down the bay:

"The rudder swings—yet none doth steer,
What living hand hath brought it here?"

It is perfectly easy to make of this a symbol of a wrecked life, or even of mankind, yet we must read it into the poem. Henley, as much of a romanticist as Arnold is a classicist, has also written of an "old black rotter of a boat," stranded in midstream, "with a horrid list, a frightening lapse from line." As he looks at it,

“ the good green earth seemed dying—
 Dying or dead;
 And, as I looked on the old boat, I said:—
 ‘ Dear God, it’s I!’ ”¹

This strikes home with a sense of pathos that either was beyond Arnold or from which he shrank. In general we feel this lack of a strong emotional power throughout his poetry, both in his imaginative and in his personal writing. *Tristram and Iseult* may challenge a comparison with the best of Tennyson’s *Idylls*, yet the last interview of the lovers is poorly written; the emotion never rises to the tragic situation and the very metre flags. Hamlet’s self-analysis is accompanied with bursts of passion; Arnold’s by melancholy.

So clear a thinker must discover some way of escape, and as befits a devoted admirer of Wordsworth, Arnold finds his message of hope in nature. After he has drawn in *A Summer Night* a depressing picture of man’s unmeaning taskwork and his vain attempts to gain release from it—“Madman or slave, must man be one?”—the moonlit heavens tell him that man, if he wishes, may make his soul’s horizon boundless. In *Self-Dependence*, a voice assures him that man may attain the tranquillity of the unaffrighted, undistracted stars that pour all their powers in their own tasks:

“ ‘Resolve to be thyself: and know, that he
 Who finds himself, loses his misery.’ ”

This doctrine is most beautifully expressed in one of the noblest English sonnets, *Quiet Work*, which reveals Nature’s message to be “toil unsevered from tranquillity.” It is man’s moral duty to see life steadily and see it whole, for whoever does this will “think clear, feel deep, bear fruit well.”

In this brief analysis of Arnold’s chief lyric moods, we have said nothing of his love poetry. He composed a small number of love lyrics, songs of parting and meeting which

¹ W. E. Henley, *Hawthorn and Lavender*, London, 1901, p. 61.

if not commonplace are certainly not distinguished. Of these, *Isolation* alone is worthy of him. As he writes of the loneliness of our lives, he has discovered one of the finest similes in modern verse—that of the two islands, once united but now severed by “The unplumb’d, salt, estranging sea.” The beautifully wrought simile is characteristic of Arnold’s writing; two others, that of the tempest-driven mariner in *A Summer Night*, and above all, that of the Tyrian trader at the close of *The Scholar Gipsy*, rank with the finest examples of poetic illustration.

Though a more polished writer than Clough, it is the subjective rather than the musical element in Arnold’s verse that places him among our lyric poets. As he avoided rich and glowing description, so he shunned the melodies of the romanticists. One of his sonnets declares that poetry should be austere in speech, and many of his own unrhymed metres err in this direction and lack charm. At his best, his verses are finely modulated; the *Forsaken Merman*, on the borderland of the lyric, is a triumph in its masterly changes of metre; his sonnet on Shakespeare is a notable example of dignified, lofty expression. For pure song, his finest is the concluding lyric of Callicles in *Empedocles on Etna*; its measure is a difficult one, but the lightly moving verses never falter:

“ Not here, O Apollo!
Are haunts meet for thee.
But, where Helicon breaks down
In cliff to the sea.”

The greatest lyrical achievement of Arnold is in the ode, for surely the *Scholar Gipsy* deserves that title. *Thyrsis*, his elegy on Clough, is full of the beauty of the country about Oxford,

“ that sweet city with her dreaming spires,
She needs not June for beauty’s heightening,”

but his sorrow for his friend is not expressed with as much feeling as his lament for the men of his time, the "vague half-believers of our casual creeds." The *Scholar Gipsy* contains all the finest qualities of his poetry: his academic spirit, his love of nature, his penetrating criticism of modern thought, his unconquerable idealism—all expressed in his purest, most musical, and loftiest style. If Arnold's fame were to rest on any single poem, it would be this one.

IV

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1809-1861) is one of the strongest personalities of the nineteenth century. Though an invalid from girlhood, she had no narrow outlook upon the world and in *Aurora Leigh* eloquently asserted the surpassing interest and significance of the age in which she lived. On the other hand, she saw its dark sides, she was aroused by the cruelty and the injustice of modern social conditions, and her *Cry of the Children*, reminding us of Hood, is a stirring plea against child labor. An idealist, neither her own suffering nor the ills of life could shake her strong religious faith. Two countries—England and Italy—were home to her and both aroused her loyalty; when the Austrians were driven over the border, no one felt more keenly the thrill of patriotism that unified a nation. She found her inspiration not only in life but in books, for she was a Greek scholar and well read in English poetry. Thus she had many of the traits and the gifts that go to the making of a great lyric poet, yet because one was not granted to her, very little of her work will endure. She lacked art.

Her study of Greek did not correct her imperfect sense of form. We see this defect most plainly in her verse novel, *Aurora Leigh*. It has a number of striking resemblances to that most emotional of romances, *Jane Eyre*, and these are not superficial incidents, but turning points in the plots. For example, in both novels the hero's marriage is inter-

rupted at the very altar in a highly sensational manner; in both novels the hero is blinded by the burning of his ancestral home. *Jane Eyre*, however, is much more of an artistic whole; it carries the reader along breathlessly while in *Aurora Leigh* the action is neglected for over-lengthy dialogues and discussions. The poem is full of keen and even deep comments on society and human character; it has many phrases so striking that they seem to have come from the pages of our finest dramatists; it is filled with passages of acute and sympathetic description—an English garden, a London fog, the Paris flower market, Florence seen from Bellosguardo. All these fine qualities never hide from us the fact that the story is weak in construction, diffuse in method, and superficial in its character drawing. It lacks art.

Her lyrics show the same faults: they are long drawn out, careless in diction, atrocious in their rhymes. Their thought is generally slight and their sentiment is frequently too obvious. In the songs of imagination, she is generally uninspired; she is at her best when she writes of her own feelings. The *Drama of Exile* does not show her finest work, yet its choruses are such typical examples of the defects we have mentioned that we shall cite one, supposed to be sung by angels to the exiled Adam and Eve:

“Mortal man and woman,
Go upon your travel!
Heaven assist the Human
Smoothly to unravel
All that web of pain
Wherein ye are holden.
Do ye know our voices
Chanting down the golden?
Do ye guess our choice is,
Being un beholden,
To be harkened by you yet again?”¹

¹ *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, Oxford, 1908, p. 112.

This must have made the expulsion from Eden doubly bitter. It seems incredible that the same writer should have produced, even at a later period, such an imaginative and musical lyric as "What was he doing, the great god Pan."

The *Sonnets from the Portuguese* contain Mrs. Browning's best lyrics. Here the form compelled her to come at once to the heart of the matter; she chose the Italian rhyme scheme, and the result justified once again Gautier's advice to the artist to select a difficult medium for his thought. Yet even here the technique is never remarkable and frequently lacks distinction; the sonnets live because of their emotional power.

Written for her husband, these poems are so personal, so frank in laying bare her most intimate feelings, that they give the reader a sense of constraint; he is overhearing whispered vows, he is profaning a sanctuary. Remembering their history we can not view them coldly. In the presence of this life of the soul, it seems pedantry to speak of art, yet we must endeavor to forget the circumstances of the composition of these sonnets and read them critically. Why is it that we do not turn repeatedly to them? It is because all is emotion, and the tone of the writing becomes morbid; it is because introspection is pushed so far that it brings a cruel delight in self-abasement. Here again we approach Jane Eyre's ruthless examination of her own worthlessness. These sonnets have the atmosphere of the sick room in which they were written and their feverish tone is too unrelieved. It would be hard to find another sequence with so little description, by way of adornment or contrast, or as a means of illustrating moods. Here indeed is a superabundance of that emotion which the Elizabethan sonneteers lacked; in fact she repeats an Elizabethan theme:

"Love me not for comely grace,
For my pleasing eye or face,"

in "If thou must love me, let it be for me," but her treatment of it has nothing of the old simplicity and lightness of touch.

We have said that these sonnets live because of their emotional power and yet we have made these strictures on the feelings they disclose. This implies that the collection as a whole is written at too high a tension; nevertheless certain of the sonnets are worthy to rank with the best that England has produced. The finest are numbers one, three, fourteen, twenty-five, and above all, forty-three, "How do I love thee." With these should be placed one not in this series, the sonnet on Grief, "I tell you, hopeless grief is passionless." Her simile of the desert may be an obvious one, yet what power of suggestion there is in its three lines, while in the impressive ending, her style gains an unwonted breadth and strength.

" Deep-hearted man, express
Grief for thy dead in silence like to death:—
Most like a monumental statue set
In everlasting watch and moveless woe,
Till itself crumble to the dust beneath.
Touch it: the marble eyelids are not wet;
If it could weep, it would arise and go."

Where Mrs. Browning failed, Christina Rossetti (1830-1894), the sister of the poet of the *House of Life*, succeeded absolutely; in her work, form and feeling perfectly blend. She wrote with ease; her thoughts sung themselves, yet fluency never lowered her artistic standards. Her brother, W. M. Rossetti, regrets that she was over-scrupulous in her spiritual life; in her verse, this trait made her an almost flawless artist within the restricted sphere of her work. There are no needless rhymes, no unnecessary phrases in her lyrics; she gained her effects quietly, without one superfluous word. Unlike Jane Austen in character, she resembled her absolutely in her exquisite gift of selection and in her sense of style. In her religious poems, especially in her carols, she

has the naïveté of the writers of our early English lyrics; there is no pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war in her religious conflicts. While there is a love of beauty evident in all her work, it has nothing of the Pre-Raphaelite color or sensuousness.

In her faultless sense of rhythm, she is worthy to stand near Herrick, for though he had a broader nature and a wider vision, she has his delicate ear for the modulations of verse, his endless variety of metre, and his economy of phrase. Like Herrick also is her avoidance of the greater lyric; short and quick are her songs. Even readers who are not in sympathy with her prevailing states of mind, are attracted by the music of her lines. Forms that are old take on a new cadence as she writes them; forms that she invents, surprise us by their perfection, not by their novelty, as her lines to France written in 1870, in which the same rhyme is repeated through every stanza. Never master of the long, slow line; never building up a stately palace of art with Spenserian verse, she is past master of the short song that completely renders the mood by description or even by mere suggestion:

“ I wish I were a little bird
Which out of sight doth soar;
I wish I were a song once heard
But often pondered o’er,
Or shadow of a lily stirred
By wind upon the floor,
Or echo of a loving word
Worth all that went before,
Or memory of a hope deferred
That springs again no more.”¹

Wordsworth affirmed that “nuns fret not at their convent’s narrow room,” but dramatists tell us otherwise. Christina

¹ W. M. Rossetti, *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti*, London, 1904, p. 309.

Rossetti, ascetic and mystic, was in character a nun; she turned from the world believing it to be but vanity of vanities. It is strange to read that her religious scruples made her at eighteen turn aside from the theatre and opera, and even from the game of chess; it is pathetic to read that she parted from her lover because his religious ideals were not her own.¹ Not the enjoyment of life but renunciation was her creed; several times in her poetry she pictures the Christian martyr in pagan Rome. She humbles herself; she asks for the lowest place—and yet from her convent's narrow room, to use the image, she sees the beauty of the world and loves it; she sees man's devotion and longs for it. It is an old theme for a tragedy but it has lost none of its pathos whether it appears in her sonnets *Monna Innominata* or in a slighter song:

“ The door was shut. I looked between
 Its iron bars; and saw it lie,
 My garden, mine, beneath the sky,
Pied all with flowers bedewed and green.”²

In some verse entitled *Charity*, composed when she was fourteen, she has imitated, to quote her own words, “that beautiful little poem *Virtue*, by George Herbert,” and in many of her later lyrics she frequently reminds us of him. Like Herbert, she has a series of songs on the festivals of the church and saints' days; like Herbert she is impressed with her own unworthiness and struggles to gain peace. She did not have Herbert's intellectual power; she was quite incapable of such a poem as *Man*, for instead of searching thought, or obstinate questionings, she employs delicate imagery or vivid description, yet no religious poems in the language are more penetrating than hers. If she is not more spiritual than

¹ P. liii.

² P. 320.

Herbert in the temper of her mind, she is in her style. One of her masterpieces, *Sleep at Sea*, depicts the indifference of mankind drifting on to spiritual death:

“ Sound the deep waters:—
Who shall sound that deep?—
Too short the plummet,
And the watchmen sleep.”

Herbert would have expressed this thought in a few closely packed phrases or in a vivid metaphor; her imagination is so stirred, that the poem has caught something of the magic quality of the *Ancient Mariner* as she sings of the sleeping sailors and of the spirits that try in vain to rouse them:

“ One by one slowly,
Ah how sad and slow!
Wailing and praying
The spirits rise and go:
Clear stainless spirits,
White, as white as snow;
Pale spirits, wailing
For an overthrow.”¹

Vanity of vanities is its conclusion, and it is her own view of the world. She longs for death because it brings peace. There is no shudder as she writes of the grave; with the simplicity of the morality plays, she sings in *Up-hill* of the inevitable end.

Nature meant more to her than books or art. As she made no attempt at a large philosophy of life, so she has no desire to picture the imposing aspects of ocean and mountain. The wind, the birds, the fruits and flowers, are enough for her:

¹ P. 155.

" My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a watered shoot:
My heart is like an apple-tree
Whose boughs are bent with thickest fruit;
My heart is like a rainbow shell
That paddles in a halcyon sea;
My heart is gladder than all these
Because my love is come to me."¹

This lyric, *The Birthday*, is her one happy love song; there is this same note of ecstasy in the opening of *To-Day and To-Morrow*, but the mood quickly changes to

" I wish I were dead, my foe,
My friend, I wish I were dead,
With a stone at my tired feet
And a stone at my tired head."

Her fine sonnet, *The Pause*, with its happy ending, is not as typical as "Remember me when I am gone away," "Come to me in the silence of the night," or "When I am dead, my dearest." In all these poems there is no bitterness or revolt; they are lyrics of resignation not of pessimism.

We may safely predict that as surely and steadily as Mrs. Browning's fame has declined, Christina Rossetti's will grow. Mrs. Browning had the larger mind and the wider interests; she attempted greater things, but her success was only a partial one. Christina Rossetti's range is exceedingly limited; all her work is in one tone, in one key, but her success is absolute. She spoke of the author of the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* as "the great poetess of our own time"; so far as the lyric is concerned, we may with more justice apply that phrase to herself.

It is a natural transition from the religious lyrics of Christina Rossetti to the hymns of the church. Because of their music and because of the memories they awaken, their

appeal is altogether out of proportion to their artistic merit. A large percentage of the hymns in any modern collection will be found to belong to the eighteenth, not to the nineteenth century, and if we contrast the work of Watts or Newton with the religious lyrics of Heber, Keble, and Faber, we shall find that the modern writers show more art in their metres and in their descriptions, especially of nature, and that they offer a more intimate expression of their doubts and beliefs. On the other hand, their poems have less of the sense of awe; they are more personal and less sublime. In a word, hymnology has felt the influence of the romantic movement.

It would be rash to attempt to decide what modern hymns will become classics, but a selection of the best and the most typical of them would surely include "Forever with the Lord," by James Montgomery (1771-1854), "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," by Reginald Heber (1783-1826), "Sun of my soul," by John Keble (1792-1866), "Abide with me," by Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847), "Lead, kindly Light," by Cardinal Newman (1801-1890), "Nearer, my God, to thee," by Sarah Flower Adams (1805-1848), "I heard the voice of Jesus say," by Horatius Bonar (1808-1889), and "Hark, hark, my soul," by Frederick William Faber (1814-1863).

V

We shall consider as a study in contrasts four poets whose works have nothing in common. It is a convenient and a striking exposition of the wide range of the modern lyric.

The first volume published by George Meredith (1828-1909) was a book of verse that appeared in 1851; his last formal publication, *A Reading of Life and other Poems*, was brought out in 1901. Thus for half a century, not satisfied with his established reputation as a novelist, he was desirous of being numbered among the great poets of his day. He

had many endowments that justified this ambition. His verse is marked by intellectual force, by a tireless energy of mind, by imagination and passion. He has the dramatic instinct and in *Modern Love* shows a subtlety of character analysis that Browning, except in so long a poem as *The Ring and the Book*, never surpassed. He is a nature lover, but he does more than picture the woods and reproduce the song of the lark; he has an original and an inspiring philosophy of life that links closely the earth and man, her son. With his equipment, there was every reason to presume that he might rank with the chief poets of the Victorian age, yet in all probability, much of his work will not endure. Many poets have been forgotten because of style misapplied; Meredith will be neglected because of style unapplied.

He has written some of the most obscure poems of the century. Compared with many of his pages, Browning's most involved passages are fairly lucid. In an appreciative and even enthusiastic critique of Meredith's verse, Mr. de Selincourt suggests that *The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady* "must be read at least twenty times" to be understood.¹ What baffles us is generally not the subtlety or the profundity of the thought but an inexcusable violation of the simplest laws of composition. Needless inversions; confusing compression or omission of the connecting links of thought; the too rapid succession of metaphors; grotesque eccentricities of construction and diction—all these faults are too plainly evident. Yet when he wished, Meredith could write as all true poets must write, with a straightforward appeal to the mind and heart, and then his work gained rather than lost in individuality. *The Lark Ascending*; *A Night of Frost in May*, the best of the sonnets; *Modern Love*; *Attila*; *France, December, 1870*, compel our admiration not at the twentieth reading but at the first. If the study of poetry has taught us anything, it has shown

¹ M. Sturge Henderson, *George Meredith*, N. Y., 1907, p. 242.

that neither stimulating thought nor startling originality of diction can take the place of clear expression. When Meredith chose the wrong path, as he did too frequently, he did so deliberately.

As Meredith's style was new, so were his rhythms. He delighted in avoiding measures proved worthy by long tradition and his poetry contains numerous experiments in metre. In *Modern Love*, he uses, in place of the sonnet, a sonnet-like form of sixteen lines. In this case, the innovation is a success, but on the whole he does not show in his new forms the poet's instinct for the line and stanza that alone fit his thought. A sure test of a writer's sense of form is the manner in which he varies the rhythm of a poem, as Tennyson does in *Maud* or *The Lotos-Eaters*. Judged from this standpoint, Meredith's odes, even *France*, show an absence of the artistic sense. FitzGerald once said that Tennyson's *In Memoriam* had "the air of being evolved by a Poetical Machine of the highest order." This criticism would be a fair one if transferred to many of Meredith's attempts to discover new metres.

"When by Zeus relenting the mandate was revoked,
Sentencing to exile the bright Sun-God,
Mindful were the ploughman of who the steer had yoked,
Who: and what a trace showed the upturned sod!"

In this over-emphasis of accent, we seem to hear "the very pulse of the machine," yet in this same poem are such musical verses as:

"Water, sweetest soother to kiss a wound and cool,
Sweetest and divinest, the sky-born brook,
Chuckled with a whimper, and made a mirror-pool,"

for as his diction can be above reproach, so his lines can be splendidly harmonious. From the *Hymn to Colour* we take this imaginative stanza that would have delighted Spenser:

“Look now where Colour, the soul’s bridegroom, makes
 The house of heaven splendid for the bride.
 To him as leaps a fountain she awakes,
 In knotting arms, yet boundless: him beside,
 She holds the flower to heaven, and by his power
 Brings heaven to the flower.”

yet we fall from this to cacaphony in:

“With thee, O fount of the Untimed! to lead;
 Drink they of thee, thee eying, they unaged
 Shall on through brave wars waged.”

There is the same contradiction in his metres that there is in his style.

The number of lyrics in Meredith’s poetry is not large. Occasionally he tried to write snatches of song, to give to a mood or fancy light and graceful expression; we even find him writing anapests—and they are poor ones. Two of the shorter lyrics deserve to be remembered: *Woodland Peace*, and *Song in the Songless*, so exquisite in its rhythm that it resembles the best work of the neo-Celtic school. Of his sonnets, the best are *Earth’s Secret*, *Internal Harmony*, *The Spirit of Shakespeare*, and above all, *Lucifer in Starlight*. Of the last one, we may assert that Milton himself would have been proud to own it, for it has caught the exalted spirit of his epic. It is sublime in its conception and magnificent in its expression. *Modern Love*—his greatest work—is one of the most subtle and moving tragedies in English verse. Its “sonnets,” dramatic and to a greater degree analytic, are rarely lyrical; the lovers are no longer “beneath the singing sky of May,” and when we first see them they are struck by

“that fatal knife,
 Deep questioning, which probes to endless dole.”

Yet two of the “sonnets” at least, and they are among the best of the sequence, belong to our study, “Mark where the pressing wind shoots javelin like” and “We saw the swallows

gathering in the sky," two elegies expressing hopeless despair. The first opens with a description of wind and waves and has no parallel in English verse, and ends with the agonising cry:

" In tragic life, God wot,
No villain need be! Passions spin the plot:
We are betrayed by what is false within."

The second is equally poignant, for though it is composed in a quieter strain it but shows the calmness of a spirit that knows the fatal stroke will not long be delayed.

Love in the Valley is the best known of all his lyrics. When it first appeared in the *Poems* of 1851, Tennyson wrote that he had gone up and down stairs repeating it, and that he wished it had been his own;¹ Stevenson has said that the stanza beginning "When her mother tends her" haunted him and made him drunk like wine. This picture of the young girl seen against the background of the four seasons is characteristic of Meredith's best work only in its original metre and its vivid descriptions; it lacks his incisive thought. We would not say of it that "pure description takes the place of sense," yet it would be even more of a masterpiece if we felt in it more of the poet's mind. In its first version it consisted of but eleven stanzas; in adding fifteen more to it, Tennyson felt that Meredith had spoiled it. We could ill afford to lose some of the later stanzas, yet the poem as it now stands is somewhat over-sensuous. If it surprises, it also tires us by a fine excess.

In Meredith's odes there is no lack of thought, but the shaping intelligence is not evident enough. They are full of high sounding and imaginative phrases; one discovers in them any number of splendid individual lines, but the final impression of such an ode as *Napoleon* is that of strength ill used. *France* is by far the best of the series. It has

¹T. H. Warren, *The Centenary of Tennyson*, Oxford, 1909, p. 20.

force, nobility of thought, and a lofty expression, but in many a passage the spirit of song droops and falters. It has the epic rather than the lyric quality.

Arthur O'Shaughnessy (1844-1881) had a metrical gift which seemed to so excellent a judge as Palgrave "the finest, after Tennyson, of any of our later poets." His first volume was cordially received; he was given a place next Rossetti, and critics believed that England had produced one more poet to continue her great tradition of song. It was realised that the substance of his verse lacked strength, but it was hoped that the years would bring the philosophic mind and that he would have something to say which would be worth "the garment of perfect poetic speech," to quote from a contemporary review. Time would give him a wider outlook and a deeper sympathy with life. This hope was never fulfilled.

Our great poets have had something new to offer us in their style as well as in their thought and emotion. The endless variety of human experience will never be even partially recorded in verse. O'Shaughnessy never had a firm hold on life; his forte lay in the other direction, in giving us dreams and reminiscences of emotion rather than the emotions themselves. There is something exotic in all that he wrote:

"We are the music makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
And sitting by desolate streams;—
World-losers and world-forsakers,
On whom the pale moon gleams:
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world forever, it seems."¹

To this band of singers he certainly belonged. His vein of ore is a very narrow one and in the greater part of his work

¹ *Music and Moonlight*, London, 1874, p. 1.

we feel constantly disappointed at the poverty of the subject-matter. He repeated himself too frequently and the critics who heralded his coming, ended by pronouncing him insincere. Every writer, if he has anything worth saying, repeats himself but always with some difference in thought or manner. After having written Hamlet's great soliloquy on death, we should have imagined that Shakespeare never would have composed another. In *Measure for Measure* he returns to the same theme, but here the speaker is a coward and Claudio's thrilling lines, inspired by a fear that destroys all sense of shame, have little in common with Hamlet's thoughts. We do not imply that O'Shaughnessy should have resembled Shakespeare; we point out merely that he lacked the dramatic instinct which the finest lyric poets have always felt and that, in consequence of this, he never varies his tone.

It has been suggested that O'Shaughnessy would have achieved his greatest distinction by translating French verse into English. He was well known in Paris; he was a great admirer of French literature; and he had made many of the Latin principles of art his own. He felt that England needed more of art for art's sake; "correctness of form," he wrote, "is virtue. Beauty is all God's gift and man's mastery." Despite this, he lacked the restraint of a true artist and his lyrics are greatly improved by excisions. In the second part of the *Golden Treasury*, a volume which missed Tennyson's guiding hand, Palgrave has included seventeen of O'Shaughnessy's lyrics; no other poet, except Tennyson himself, is represented by so large a number. Palgrave, however, has not only printed practically every lyric of value, but has skillfully condensed them. O'Shaughnessy's complete works are a disappointment.

When we have praised the poet's music, we have said the final word. It is all pitched in one key: it is plaintive, dreamy, charmingly pathetic, but never poignant or inspiring. His life was saddened by the death of wife and chil-

dren and all his work is melancholy in tone. *The Fountain of Tears*; *The Spectre of the Past*, with its evident reminiscence of De Musset; even his love songs are written in a minor strain:

“ She entered with her weary smile,
Just as of old;
She looked around a little while,
And shivered at the cold.
Her passing touch was death to all,
Her passing look a blight:
She made the white rose-petals fall,
And turn'd the red rose white.”¹

In much that he writes we hear echoes of other poets. *In Love's Eternity* is almost the converse of the *Blessed Damsel*, for it shows us the lover, not the maiden, waiting in heaven. Some lyrics have a suggestion of Poe; the *Song of Palms* offers that beauty of description which Leconte de Lisle and his contemporaries cultivated.

It seemed a fatality that kept O'Shaughnessy from his rightful place among the Victorian poets, for he could always sing. In music we may listen entranced to a song in a strange tongue; in poetry we are not satisfied long with mere melody.

Coventry Patmore (1823-1896) began his poetic career as an admirer of Tennyson. One stanza from *The River*, written when he was sixteen, shows his discipleship:

“ The sheep-bell tolls the curfew time;
The gnats, a busy rout,
Fleck the warm air; the distant owl
Shouteth a sleepy shout;
The voiceless bat, more felt than seen,
Is flitting round about.”²

¹ P. 39.

² Basil Champneys, *Poems by Coventry Patmore*, London, 1909, p. 402.

From this to his *Odes* is a far cry. If Patmore had continued to write in this style, many others would have surpassed him; but choosing a new form and a firmer and less florid tone for his lyrics, he disclosed an individuality which will win for him as times goes on more and more readers.

Sargent took the poet as his model for Ezekiel in his frieze of the prophets and there was an appropriateness in this, for Patmore considered himself a seer and a teacher. He believed that it was given to him to expound an old, and yet for our days, a new doctrine of love. Ardent Catholic and exalted mystic, he saw in human love a faint type of the love of Christ for the soul. In his eyes, passion was sanctified by this and he did not hesitate to depict it in some of the boldest writing in our poetry. In this conception of love, he is far removed from any poet we have considered; he has something of Crashaw's spirit—though nothing of his fluency, in the odes at least—but as a mystic, he soared far beyond his predecessor.

If the eighteen poems in the second book of *The Unknown Eros* are written, as he admitted, "in a dead language"; if the analogies which he draws between the earthly and the heavenly repel more often than they attract, the odes in the first book come very close to human experience and thought. Their realism is so true and so intense that we seem to be taking part in a tragedy rather than to be hearing a poet sing. There is nothing here of the fluent and shallow sentimentalism of *The Angel in the House*; here are no artful dirges sung over Love's grave, but the cries of a stricken soul. His wife's death inspired *The Azalea* and *Departure*, two of the most pathetic poems in the language. It is a sign of greatness that in Patmore's odes the simplest event gains a significance which we attach to some unusual or terrifying catastrophe. An azalea that his wife had tended, wakens him in the night by its fragrance, after her death; his little child

whom he had struck, "His Mother, who was patient, being dead," puts by its bedside:

" A box of counters and a red-veined stone,
A piece of glass abraded by the beach
And six or seven shells,
A bottle with bluebells
And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful art,
To comfort his sad heart."¹

From these slight incidents, he has gained in the *Azalea* and *The Toys* the most poignant effects. There is all the intensity of Donne in *Departure* and as Gosse has remarked, there is much of Donne's spirit in the poet's grief that he heard no last good-bye; this afflicts him even more than the thought of her death:

" But all at once to leave me at the last,
More at the wonder than the loss aghast,
With huddled, unintelligible phrase,
And frightened eye,
And go your journey of all days
With not one kiss, or a good-bye,
And the only loveless look the look with which you passed:
'Twas all unlike your great and gracious ways."²

Our quotations have shown the peculiar structure of his odes, as irregular as any Pindaric but much more compact. Gosse finds in them a resemblance to the Italian canzone, though in reading them we miss both the song quality and the beauty of phrase of the Italian. At times harsh in diction and grotesque in imagery, they have a sincerity of feeling and a strength of tone that is all too rare in the lyric of the present day.

¹ P. 287.

² P. 285.

William Barnes (1801-1886) was a Dorsetshire clergyman. Self-educated, devoted to the history and traditions of his shire, he was even better known as a philologist than as an antiquarian. Above all else, he valued the dialect of Dorset, pointing out with pride its superiority of vocabulary and construction over English, of which it is a distinct branch and not a corruption, and in Dorsetshire speech he composed his best work. He published in 1868 *Poems of Rural Life, in Common English*, but the collection as a whole is thin in quality though it contained such lyrics as *The Mother's Dream* (worthy of Blake), *The Wind at the Door*, *Joy Passing by*, and *Plorata Veris Lachrymis* which has the simplicity of Cowper:

“ How can I live my lonesome days?
How can I tread my lonesome ways?
How can I take my lonesome meal?
Or how outlive the grief I feel?
Or how again look on to weal?
Or sit, at rest, before the heat
Of winter fires, to miss thy feet,
When evening light is waning?”¹

Sprung from the soil, Barnes thoroughly understood the Dorset peasant. He aimed to reproduce not only his language, but the turn of his mind and his very emotions, and he succeeded. The metres of the poems are too skillfully handled to suggest peasant song. Barnes is fond of employing the refrain, that favorite device of folk poetry, and the ones he uses are the very simplest, “When birds be still,” “Moonlight on the door,” “Sleep did come wi’ the dew,” but there is little of the uncouth swain in his rhythms. In the content of his verse and in his language, Barnes is a realist of the highest order; his poems are the truest pastorals of the century.

¹ P. 197.

This is to infer that these lyrics of peasant life have a limited range. Unlike the Corydons of Elizabethan pastoral, these farmers hold no literary or religious discussions; they have no great ambitions, but are contented with "their destiny obscure." They enjoy the flowers and the fields; they appreciate the physical comforts of their homes; they fall in love; they weep over the dead. The simplicity of these poems is equalled by their sincerity of tone; the poet does not obtrude himself to explain or to moralise but seems to be recording songs he has overheard. He is most effective in his pensive moods:

" We now mid hope vor better cheer, (may hope)
My smilèn wife o' twice vive year.
Let others frown, if thou bist near
 Wi' hope upon thy brow, Jeäne;
Vor I vu'st lov'd thee when thy light
Young sheäpe vu'st grew to woman's hight;
I loved thee near, an' out o' zight,
 An' I do love thee now, Jeäne."¹

There is nothing of the ardor of Burns in this; although the two poets have been compared, their natures were essentially different.

The majority of writers use dialect as a mere ornament; with Barnes, it is the very warp and woof of his verse. Fortunately, as our quotation shows, the Dorset speech offers no difficulties that might hinder the reader from enjoying this "genuine, original, exquisite Singer."

VI

We have saved for the closing pages of the chapter two writers of light verse. Whatever definition we may hold of poetry, we certainly believe it must give pleasure. Judged

¹ T. Hardy, *Select Poems of William Barnes*, London, 1908, p. 23.

by this standard, the *Lyra Frivola* which has ever added to the enjoyment of life, deserves, if we may use the phrase, our serious consideration.

In his anthology of light verse, *Lyra Elegantiarum*, Locker-Lampson, has given the best definition of this *genre*. "Genuine *vers de société* and *vers d'occasion* should be short, elegant, refined, and fanciful, not seldom distinguished by chastened sentiment, and often playful. The tone should not be pitched high; it should be idiomatic, and rather in the conversational key; the rhythm should be crisp and sparkling and the rhyme frequent and never forced, while the entire poem should be marked by tasteful moderation, high finish, and completeness: for, however trivial the subject-matter may be, indeed rather in proportion to its triviality, subordination to the rules of composition and perfection of execution should be strictly enforced. . . . The two qualities of brevity and buoyancy are absolutely essential. . . . The chief merit of *vers de société* is, that it should seem to be entirely spontaneous. At the same time, it is right to observe that this absence of effort, as recognized in most works of real excellence, is only apparent; the writing of *vers de société* is a difficult accomplishment." The writer of light verse must express his sentiment, his wit, his emotion, in a careless tone but in the most finished form. He assumes a nonchalance that he does not feel. Humor is no essential element in this *genre*; indeed, light verse is more prone to cause a sigh than a smile.

Locker-Lampson observes that though many poets have attempted to compose light verse, they have produced little that deserves remembrance. We notice that anthologists are compelled to eke out their collections with poems that are anything but *vers de société*. The latest book of light verse reprints Sidney's "Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show"; Shakespeare's sonnet, "Who will believe my verse in time to come"; Jonson's "Drink to me only with thine

eyes"; Lovelace's *To Althea* and *To Lucasta*; Herrick's *To Dianeme* and *To Meadows*; Blake's *To the Muses* and "Never seek to tell thy love"; Wordsworth's *The Tables Turned*; Browning's *The Lost Mistress*.¹ Not one of these lyrics has the qualities of light verse; either their emotion is too strong, their thoughts too far-reaching, or their art too elevated. Typical examples of light verse are Prior's "Dear Chloe, how blubbered is that pretty face"; Gray's *Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat*; Cowper's *Gratitude*; Praed's *Letter of Advice*; and to come to the period we are considering, the poems of William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863) and of Frederick Locker-Lampson (1821-1895).

The light verse of Thackeray possesses the qualities which Locker-Lampson demanded, save one. His poems are conversational in tone, they touch the emotions lightly, but they are not remarkable for their finish, though they are not carelessly written. In *Bouillabaisse*, the poet sitting in a Paris restaurant, an old haunt of his student days, recalls his lost friends. It is the same theme that Lamb has touched in *The Old Familiar Faces*, a poem too serious, too pathetic for society verse; in Thackeray's lines the poet's reveries of "the kind old voices and old faces" can not turn to melancholy, for "Here comes the smoking Bouillabaisse." In *The Cane-Bottomed Chair*, an unhappy romance is lightly sketched. We are taken to the bachelor's lodgings beneath the chimney-pots and are shown his curios and belongings, the most precious of all being "a bandy-legged, high-shouldered, worm-eaten seat." It was here that "Saint Fanny, my patroness sweet" once sat:

"It was but a moment she sat in this place,
She'd a scarf on her neck, and a smile on her face!
A smile on her face, and a rose in her hair,
And she sat there, and bloomed in my cane-bottomed chair.

¹ R. M. Leonard, *A Book of Light Verse*, Oxford, 1910.

“ When the candles burn low, and the company’s gone,
In the silence of night as I sit here alone—
I sit here alone, but we yet are a pair—
My Fanny I see in my cane-bottomed chair.

“ She comes from the past and revisits my room;
She looks as she then did, all beauty and bloom;
So smiling and tender, so fresh and so fair,
And yonder she sits in my cane-bottomed chair.”

In his *Letters to Dead Authors*, Andrew Lang calls Thackeray the first of English writers of light verse, but considering the small number of poems he has given us, this is overpraise. What little we have shows a fine and generous spirit and a feeling that never verges on sentimentality. For more such lines we would willingly exchange many pages from the novels.

Locker-Lampson writes with the utmost regard for form and finish; every epithet, every rhyme is well considered, and in this small realm of verse he is a thorough artist. His *London Lyrics* have more wit and humor than Thackeray’s poems, for such broad burlesques as *The Ballads of Policeman X* do not concern us. Piccadilly, Pall Mall, Rotten Row are his Elysian fields, and he delights in the comedy of Vanity Fair:

“ Philosophy halts, wisest counsels are vain,
We go, we repent, we return there again;
To-night you will certainly meet with us there—
So come and be merry in Vanity Fair!”¹

yet there is nothing of Worldly-Wiseman in his spirit. He is ever on the borderland of romance, and tenderness, even pathos, is not far distant when he writes of *The Government Clerk* or *The Widow’s Mite*. If it is but a step from the

¹ *London Lyrics*, 7th ed., 1874, p. 33.

sublime to the ridiculous, it is but half a step from laughter to tears.

Thackeray's *Cane-Bottomed Chair* has its counterpart in *My Neighbour Rose*.

“ Though walls but thin our hearths divide,
We're strangers dwelling side by side;
How gaily all your days must glide
Unvex'd by labour!
I've seen you weep, and could have wept;
I've heard you sing, (and might have slept!)
Sometimes I hear your chimney swept,
My charming neighbour!

The poet watches her grow from girlhood to womanhood; he sees from his window the coming of her hero,

“ joyous twenty-two,
Who sent *bouquets* and *billets doux*,
And wore a sabre,”

and finally her wedding procession:

“ What change in one short afternoon,
My own dear neighbour gone,—so soon!
Is yon pale orb her honey-moon
Slow rising hither?
Lady! so wan and marvellous,
How often have we communed thus;
Sweet memory shall dwell with us,—
And joy go with her!”¹

CHAPTER TEN

THE LYRIC OF TO-DAY

I

Before we come to the poets who continue to-day the succession of lyrists, we turn to a group of writers who have died but recently and whose works belong distinctly to the present.

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) told in prose what might well have been expressed in poetry. He recorded in his essays and, above all, in his familiar letters the questions and decisions, the discouragements and enthusiasms which so often have inspired lyric verse. If all Stevenson's writings, excepting his correspondence, were to be destroyed, his place among the English classics would be secure. His letters possess the highest charm of style, a delightful fascination in their self-portraiture, and an intense human interest. We accept them gratefully, and yet we can not refrain from wishing that he had turned more frequently to song.

It is needless to enlarge upon Stevenson's consummate art, his dramatic instinct, his child-like love of life. Madame Zassetsky's remark to him—"mais c'est que vous êtes tout simplement enfant"—was literally true; he was fitted by nature to write the finest child lyrics in the language. Although songs of childhood had been composed before, Stevenson's work is thoroughly original. Marvell and Prior pay courtly compliments to a beautiful girl; Stevenson does not tell us how a child looks, but what it thinks and feels. Earlier poets had seen in childhood the age of innocence; they looked regretfully on their "angel days," and contrasted them sorrowfully with the darkened present. Steven-

son never treated youth as a foil to age. Other writers had given to children a deep though unconscious spiritual apprehension; with Vaughan the child spies heaven in a flower; with Blake it finds a symbol in a lamb. Stevenson is truer to life.

We are all in turn romanticist and realist. In *The Child's Garden of Verses* we find the contrast between the matter-of-fact and the imaginative view of life. The poet understood perfectly the tendency of a child's mind to link the small and great:

"It rains on the umbrellas here,
And on the ships at sea;"

he is a realist as he describes the child's intense delight in the flowers, the trees, and the wind. When the imagination moves him, the boy does not dream of heaven, but is perfectly content to make a boat of the bed, a ship of the stairs. In every line is the zest of childhood, for Stevenson disdained to mar the golden age with a touch of pathos, although greater poets have done this. Many writers would have given a different ending to *The Sick Child in Underwoods*. As the thoughts in these lyrics are those of children—not one is beyond their reach—so is the language, with scarcely a phrase which a child does not use naturally. The art displayed in the diction is shown also in the metres; *The Swing*, *Bed in Summer*, *Where go the boats*, *My bed is a boat*, are constantly set to music, for they are pure song.

In his other lyrics, Stevenson writes with the same clear, simple style, with the same indefinable charm. There are no flights of imagination or passion in his love songs, in "I will make you brooches and toys for your delight" or *Youth and Love*; there are no deep ponderings on life or nature in a *Song of the Road* or *A Visit from the Sea*; even when he writes of his own moods, as in the exquisite "Sing me a song of a lad that is gone," the emotion has little in common with

the outpourings of the romantic school. These lyrics, written with no stirring appeal, linger in the memory when many greater songs are forgotten. At times Stevenson recalls Herrick, as in the envoy to *Underwoods*; in many poems he reminds us of Marvell's "witty delicacy"; but in his finest lyric there is hardly a note caught from English or Scottish singer. His *Requiem* is such a triumph of simplicity that every word seems inevitable. In this unadorned style Wordsworth himself wrote nothing more moving and, knowing Stevenson's nature, we may say nothing more true.

It is a far cry from the simplicity and buoyancy of Stevenson's verses to the poems of Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) and Ernest Dowson (1867-1900). Modern life continually surprises us with its studies in contrast, yet it would be hard to find anything further separated from the *Child's Garden* than the *fleurs de mal* of these two poets. Dowson's nature was the more lyrical, but Wilde had by far the stronger and the more brilliant personality and we shall consider him first.

Wilde's most characteristic work was done in prose, in his frankly artificial comedies, masterpieces of sheer cleverness, and in his greatest piece of writing, *De Profundis*, the requiem of a ruined life. His verse shows neither the wit and art of his plays, nor the pathos, the tragic depths of his confession. In his earliest poems he followed a well-beaten path when he wrote of Italy, but his best work, especially in his sonnets, describes not the

"purple mist and gleam
Of morning on the Apennines,"

but the gloom in his own soul. In a typical sonnet, *Easter Day*, he draws two pictures, one of the "Holy Lord of Rome" borne in splendor through the crowds, the other of

"One who wandered by a lonely sea,
And sought in vain for any place of rest."¹

¹ *Poems by Oscar Wilde*, London, 1892, p. 50.

The lines are picturesque, the phrasing is admirable, yet we can not help feeling that what chiefly interested Wilde was a striking contrast. In much of his poetry the art is too evident, yet there is the ring of sincerity in *E Tenebris* when he writes:

“ My heart is as some famine-murdered land,
Whence all good things have perished utterly,
And well I know my soul in Hell must lie
If I this night before God’s throne should stand.”¹

or in another sonnet in which he cries out against himself because his life is scrawled with idle songs when he might have trodden the heights and “struck one clear chord to reach the ears of God.” Equally sincere is *Requiescat*, whose six stanzas combine the grace of Herrick with the more intense note of modern song:

“ Tread lightly, she is near
Under the snow,
Speak gently, she can hear
The daisies grow.

“ Coffin-board, heavy stone,
Lie on her breast,
I vex my heart alone,
She is at rest.”²

The downfall of Wilde produced both his greatest piece of prose and his greatest poem. The *Ballad of Reading Gaol* bears the stamp of genius. It is the most terrifying poem of the century. We go back to the Elizabethans, to the scene between Othello and Desdemona in the fourth act of the drama, to find such shuddering fear, such a laying bare of the brutality of life. To match its realism, we must

¹ P. 51.

² P. 37.

turn to the Russian novel. There is a grim irony in the poem when we remember that its ballad metre was employed by Rossetti in *The Blessed Damozel*. Here are no dreams of Paradise, not even a ray of sunlight, but on horror's head horrors accumulated. As a whole, this ballad can not be brought within our field of study, yet throughout it the feeling is so intense that the poet can not restrain himself to a bald narration of the tragedy. The "lyric cry" has become a hackneyed phrase, yet for certain passages in this poem, it is the only one to use.

" In Reading gaol by Reading town
 There is a pit of shame,
And in it lies a wretched man
 Eaten by teeth of flame,
In a burning winding-sheet he lies,
 And his grave has got no name.

" And there, till Christ call forth the dead,
 In silence let him lie:
No need to waste the foolish tear,
 Or heave the windy sigh:
The man had killed the thing he loved,
 And so he had to die.

" And all men kill the thing they love,
 By all let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
 Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss,
 The brave man with a sword!"¹

In his sympathetic memoir of Dowson, Symons declares that the poet was undoubtedly a man of genius, yet it is hardly probable that time will confirm this friendly estimate.

¹ *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, London, 1898, p. 31.

After a short residence at Oxford, Dowson passed the greater part of his life in France and the influence of French poetry is perceptible in all his work. His master is Verlaine; we should know it even though Dowson had never translated one of his lyrics. In his best work, Verlaine was a subtle invoker of moods and reveries, a musician who touched the emotions rather than the intellect. By the harmony of his lines, by a suggestion of some dim-described image "où l'imprécis au précis joint," he charms rather than inspires us. His meaning is more often felt than apprehended. Thus in *Clair de Lune* he compares a woman's soul to a landscape filled with maskers, playing the lute and singing, and in the closing stanza he tells us that their songs mingle with the moon-beams:

" Au calme clair de lune triste et beau,
 Qui fait rever les oiseaux dans les arbres,
Et sangloter d'extase les jets d'eaux,
 Les grands jets d'eau sveltes parmi les marbres."

Every reader will have his own conception of this woman's soul; on the contrary, there can be no doubt as to the type of woman depicted in Wordsworth's "She was a phantom of delight." It is this power of Verlaine's to sing a song that re-echoes in the mind, to write a lyric in which "more is meant than meets the ear," that stamps him a man of genius. Dowson's lyrics are not so freighted with suggestion. Symons believes that "he had the pure lyric gift, unweighted or unbalanced by any other quality of mind or emotion; and a song, for him, was music first, and then whatever you please afterwards, so long as it suggested, never told, some delicate sentiment, a sigh or a caress."¹ His music, however, is too faint; his delicate sentiments are not far-reaching in their

¹ *The Poems of Ernest Dowson. With a memoir by Arthur Symons*, London, 1906, p. xxvi.

appeal. Even when he translates Verlaine, the force of the lyric seems to vanish:

“ Qu’as tu fait, ô toi que voilà
Pleurant sans cesse,
Dis, qu’as tu fait, toi que voilà,
De ta jeunesse?”

becomes

“ What hast thou done, who comest here,
To weep alway?
Where hast thou laid, who comest here,
Thy youth away?”¹

The magic has gone.

The theme of Dowson’s poetry is his own line “Exceeding sorrow consumeth my sad heart.” Driven by a suicidal impulse to seek relief from the *tædium vitæ* in narcotic and stimulant, he wore his life away. His lyrics are the poetry of exhaustion:

“late I come, long after lily-time,
With burden of waste days and drifted rhyme;”

the verse of a man

“ tempest-tost, and driven from pillar to post,
A poor worn ghost.”

Nature appears to him in her mournful moods; April weeps because she knows that autumn and winter will bring all to barrenness; his garden is a garden of sorrow. Throughout his work there is no relief and his last word is

“ O pray the earth unfold
Our life-sick hearts and turn them into dust.”

He sighs rather than sings; his best quality is a plaintive music, a grace of expression. If any of his lyrics are found in the anthology of this century, it will doubtless be his

Non sum qualis eram bonæ sub regno Cynaræ, for it is an epitome of all his work:

“ I have forgot much, Cynara! gone with the wind,
Flung roses, roses riotously with the throng,
Dancing, to put thy pale, lost lilies out of mind;
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
Yea, all the time, because the dance was long:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.”¹

Of the later Victorian poets, William Ernest Henley (1849-1903) was the greatest personal force. Though a cripple, he was unsubdued by physical suffering and fairly flung himself into the literary and artistic life of his day. *London*, *The Scots Observer*, *The New Review*, *The Magazine of Art*, were all for a time under his management, and though he was unsuccessful as an editor, he rendered an invaluable service to contemporary letters by discovering and encouraging new writers. He is said to have been the first critic of distinction who recognized the genius of Meredith; he was one of the first to welcome Kipling, who resembles Henley in many of his qualities though he never equals him. In the field of art, he fostered and inspired the critical writings of R. A. M. Stevenson; he proved himself a valiant friend and a courageous champion of Rodin. He ranged over a wide field—art, music, the drama, belles-lettres—and the seven volumes of his collected writings do not include all his work. As a critic, he was interesting and stimulating, though too often governed by his prejudices. He is seen at his best in his essay on Burns, yet his most penetrating and vigorous prose does not possess the intrinsic value of his verse; it is for his lyric poetry that Henley will be remembered.

With the writers of his generation, led by Austin Dobson and Edmund Gosse, Henley felt the attraction of French

verse forms. What Wyatt and Surrey could not do, our modern poets have accomplished: they have made the rondeau a perfectly familiar metre, and we may say as much of the villanelle and the ballade. Even the Restoration writers, who might be expected to look with favor on all things French, cared nothing for these graceful measures. The two rondeaux of Cotton, the triolets of Carey, are but rare exceptions to their general disregard of French lyric forms. In 1650 there was published at Paris the *Nouveau Recueil de divers Rondeaux*, in two parts. It did not inspire imitation on the other side of the Channel, and not until quite recently were there enough English rondeaux to form even a small collection. Henley's poems in French metres are most successful. His rondeau, "When you are old"; his rondel, "The ways of death are soothing and serene"; his ballade *On Midsummer Days and Nights* and the one of *A Toyokuni Colour Print*, anticipating the Japanese poems of Noyes, have much more than their finish and their style to recommend them. They do not show, however, the real essence of Henley's spirit.

In 1873-1875 Henley was a patient in the Old Infirmary of Edinburgh. Unsubdued by suffering, he did not seek to escape from his surroundings by a flight of the imagination but with senses preternaturally alert, shaped the material for *In Hospital*, a startlingly truthful record of all he saw and felt. Many of the twenty-eight poems in this series are purely descriptive, such as the well-known sonnet describing Stevenson. There are, however, a number of unrhymed lyrics, *Operation*, *Vigil*, *Ave Cæsar*, *Music*, *Nocturn*, *Discharged*, which showed unmistakably a new genius in English song.¹ This uncompromising realist found nothing common or unclean in the most dismal experience of the sick ward; he fashioned his verses from materials that no one had used before. Nothing that we naturally expect to find in lyric

¹ *The Works of William Ernest Henley*, London, 1908, vol. I.

verse is offered to us. Instead of the scent of flowers, we have the smell of the anæsthetic reaching "hot and subtle through your being"; or when he is discharged,

"The smell of the mud in my nostrils
Blows brave,—like a breath of the sea!"

He listens not to the song of birds but to the tunes of the barrel organ in the street or "at the barren heart of midnight," hears the dripping of a cistern. Other poets have felt their hearts leap up at beholding the sky or the ocean; for Henley the "beautiful world" is in the spell of the streets, the roar of wheels, the long line of grey houses. Elsewhere in his lyrics he is the laureate of the city. He brushes away all the conventions and traditions of English poetry and finds his inspiration in the very pavements and the crowds that throng them. His *London Voluntaries* are so lyrical, so thrilled with his spirit, that they are odes. The Thames, the Parks, Trafalgar Square in the glow of the setting sun, stir him as deeply as Italy affected the romantic poets. In his songs he never avoids the obvious happenings of life, the common sights and sounds.

"I took a hansom on to-day
For a round I used to know—
That I used to take for a woman's sake,
In a fever of to-and-fro."¹

As we read the lyric, the trivial first line becomes as full of meaning as Sidney's

"Having this day, my horse, my hand, my lance
Guided so well, that I obtained the prize."

Other poets have given us realism in the analysis of feeling; Henley brings us face to face with the most ordinary aspects of life.

¹ Vol. II, p. 38.

The French and Russian novelists have taught us that men become disillusioned when they look too closely at life, when they see things as they are and not through the veil of fancy. At times realism has seemed but another term for pessimism. The most insistent note in Henley is the joy of life; this is his "brave, irresistible message."

" ' Life is worth living
Through every grain of it,
From the foundations
To the last edge
Of the cornerstone, death.' "

or again:

" Life-life-life! 'Tis the sole great thing
This side of death."¹

His lyrics fairly tingle with vitality. His song is boisterous; "they shouted it over the bar," he writes; and surely it is in no quiet mood that he declares "I am the master of my fate," or returning to his favorite theme, demands

" Life—give me life until the end,
That at the very top of being,
The battle-spirit shouting in my blood,
Out of the reddest hell of the fight
I may be snatched and flung
Into the everlasting lull,
The immortal incommunicable dream."²

The calm of the artist is not for him; there is a superb sense of motion and of force in nearly everything he writes. Such a dream as

" Or ever the knightly years were gone
With the old world to the grave,"

¹ Vol. I., p. 219.

² P. 222.

has the same energy we find in his songs of the present:

“ I saw, I took, I cast you by,
I bent and broke your pride.
You loved me well, or I heard them lie,
But your longing was denied.
Surely I knew that by and by
You cursed your gods and died.”¹

Even in death he seeks no sleep, but wishes to be buried in the sea that he may roam with the waves in “brotherly unrest.”

To understand Henley, so a critic has affirmed, we must realize that his character was elemental and essentially primitive. Certainly his lyrics reveal no complex nature; in many ways he was like a child and shouted for joy or cried for pain. There is little reflection in his writings; he does not stop to ask himself why he has these emotions; his songs are accordingly the direct and impulsive expression of his moods and passions of the moment. In their spirit, they remind us of our earliest English lyrics, of “Winter wakeneth all my care,” and kindred poems, for though their expression is more resourceful and more beautiful, Henley’s poems have the same outspoken delight in life and love, the same joy in the coming of spring. He likewise resembles our first lyrists, not in what we may call the art of nature, but in its life. Though the poet of the city and its types, he too longed to go a-Maying and sang of the country. He loved the sea

“ that breaks and glooms and swings
A weltering, glittering plain;”

he believed that the earth “utters her joy in a million ways,” and he heard it:

¹ P. 171.

"The nightingale has a lyre of gold,
The lark's is a clarion call,
And the blackbird plays but a boxwood flute,
But I love him best of all.

"For his song is all of the joy of life,
And we in the mad, spring weather,
We too have listened till he sang
Our hearts and lips together."¹

He catches in a phrase the bit of sky or field, the moving cloud or bird that delights him:

"Gulls in an aery morrice
Circle and swoop and close."

He is always the lyric poet and what he sees is not so important as what he feels.

Henley believed in the joy of life and he lived his creed; he never allowed disappointment, pain, or even death to daunt him. He bids us praise the "generous gods" for giving "unto all the joy of life"; he tells us that the very sun seems glad to shine and that life should thrill us with its bounty. The song he would have made of himself when he is dead must tell that

"early and late,
Glad ran the days with me."²

When his task is accomplished and he is gathered to the quiet west, there will be in his heart "some late lark singing." Yet he felt the desolation of sorrow. There are no more pathetic lines in recent poetry than the epilogue to his wife, picturing his lost child calling to him across the grave.

¹ Vol. I, p. 142.

² Vol. II, p. 58.

In one of his most ringing poems, Henley appeals to us to

“ Think on the shame of dreams for deeds,
The scandal of unnatural strife,
The slur upon immortal needs,
The treason done to life.”¹

No such reproach could be laid at his door; he found himself and his own message. Whatever impulse he may have received from Heine and Whitman, with whom he has been compared frequently, he is one of our most individual poets. If we consider their variety, he has written the finest unrhymed lyrics in the language; he has sounded a protest against the over-refinement and artificiality of modern verse; he has enlarged the scope of the lyric. His songs, musical, true in feeling, vivid yet simple in expression, are not as he called them

“ Poor windlestraws
On the great, sullen, roaring pool of Time
And Chance and Change.”²

They are rather those enduring monuments of which many lyrists have spoken but which very few have ever reared.

All that Henley represented made little or no appeal to Francis Thompson (1859-1907). He had known the life of the city streets and the memories of that “night-mare time” haunted him, yet he seldom pictures it in his poetry. When he writes of London, he sees not the men and women that stirred Henley’s imagination, but a Jacob’s ladder “Pitched between Heaven and Charing Cross.” Thus he never throws himself into the life about him, but seeks to escape it for a world of dreams and high imaginings. He is a poet, to quote his own line, who “lives detached days.” If his early career was unfortunate, he was peculiarly happy, as his genius was

¹ Vol. I, p. 215.

² P. 239.

unfolding, in being received into a home devoted to art and letters. The names of Wilfrid and Alice Meynell are forever linked with his, for without their friendship and inspiration it is doubtful whether his spirit would have found utterance.

The first page of Thompson that one opens discloses a highly artificial diction. He is an avowed beauty-worshipper but never content with the beauty in the obvious or commonplace:

" I disdain
To count the beauty worth my wish or gain
Which the dull daily fool can covet or obtain."¹

This is seen at once in his language. He is a seeker of gorgeous phrases; what Sir Thomas Browne was in prose, he is in verse. Keats, we remember, looked upon fine phrases as a lover, but his greater art kept him from that fantastic revel of sound in which the modern poet too frequently indulges. There could be no sharper contrast possible than exists between Keats's exquisite picture of autumn "sitting careless on a granary floor," and the personification that Thompson offers us:

" Tanned maiden! with cheeks like apples russet,
And breast a brown agaric faint-flushing at tip,
And a mouth too red for the moon to buss it
But her cheek unvow its vestalship;
Thy mists enclip
Her steel-clear circuit illuminous,
Until it crust
Rubiginous
With the glorious gules of a glowing rust."²

He compares his poetry to a treasure galleon and the simile is an apt one, for he has plundered the riches of the older

¹ *Selected Poems of Francis Thompson. With a Biographical Note by Wilfrid Meynell*, London, 1909, p. 43.

² P. 64.

poets and made them his own. At times he takes the whole measure and Drayton's *Shepherd's Sirena* becomes his *Carrier Song*; at other times he has caught merely a striking epithet. Yet though his diction is over-elaborate and his thoughts correspondingly involved, back of it all is the ever-compelling force of his feeling. This seems paradoxical yet so is the appearance of such a spirit, a greater Crashaw, in this day of realism, this age that prizes action above the dream.

No description of Thompson's style can do it justice. He may remind us at times of Spenser, of Donne, of Crashaw, of Rossetti, yet his manner is distinctly individual. He loves the pomp and pageantry of language. He employs the conceit, as did the metaphysical poets, but his diction is more magnificent than theirs:

“ When, like the back of a gold-mailèd saurian
 Heaving its slow length from Nilotic slime,
The first long gleaming fissure runs Aurorian
 Athwart the yet dun firmament of prime.”¹

A better example is offered by *The Poppy*:

“ Summer set lip to earth's bosom bare,
And left the flushed print in a poppy there:
Like a yawn of fire from the grass it came,
And the fanning wind puffed it to flapping flame.

“ With burnt mouth red like a lion's it drank
The blood of the sun as he slaughtered sank,
And dipped its cup in the purpurate shine
When the eastern conduits ran with wine.”²

He writes often of nature but we are more interested in what he thinks he sees, than in the sky or the landscape spread before him. His style is at its best not when he seeks to

¹ P. 22.

² P. 3.

reproduce the aspects of the outer world but when he expresses thoughts and feelings so high or subtle that they would seem to defy speech or when self-confession impels a more direct manner. To see this, one has only to read those superb lines from *Sister Songs* describing the child-woman:

“ Wild Dryad! all unconscious of thy tree,
 With which indissolubly
 The tyrannous time shall one day make thee whole;
 Whose frank arms pass unfettered through its bole:
 Who wear’st thy femineity
 Light as entrailèd blossoms, that shall find
 It erelong silver shackles unto thee.
 Thou whose young sex is yet but in thy soul;—
 As hoarded in the vine
 Hangs the gold skins of undelirious wine,
 As air sleeps, till it toss its limbs in breeze:—
 In whom the mystery, which lures and sunders,
 Grapples and thrusts apart, endears, estranges,
 —The dragon to its own Hesperides—
 Is gated under slow-revolving changes,
 Manifold doors of heavy-hingèd years.”¹

Equally beautiful, and more moving because of the personal appeal, is the passage from the same poem in which he speaks of his outcast days when he

“ endured through watches of the dark
 The abashless inquisition of each star,”

or his description of himself and of his fears in the *Lines to the Dead Cardinal*.

There are obvious dangers in employing such a style. To use the poet’s own phrase, “My figured descant hides the simple theme”; there is little song quality in these odes, though there is music. As Narcissus became enamored of his own image, so the poet is led astray by the sound of his

own voice. Thompson was an ascetic, the gospel of renunciation was the word heaven spoke to him, but there is no austerity in his verse. Though admiring it, we weary of its elaborate imagery, of its revelry of color, of its "gong and cymbals' din," and, to quote Watson again, we crave "a living voice, a natural tone." Such a keen critic of nineteenth century literature as Professor Walker even goes so far as to question whether in the end Thompson's *Hound of Heaven* will have the appeal of *Daisy*, one of his simplest poems, almost Wordsworthian in tone yet nearer our own time in its touch of mysticism, its far-reaching hints of loss and hope:

" The fairest things have fleetest end:
 Their scent survives their close,
But the rose's scent is bitterness
 To him that loved the rose!

" She went her unremembering way,
 She went, and left in me
The pang of all the partings gone,
 And partings yet to be."¹

We have called Thompson a greater Crashaw and indeed he surpasses him in brilliancy of technique as well as in the significance of his thought. He has something of the earlier poet's morbid spirit. He feels the call of the world yet he is forbidden to enjoy it; he is to be beauty's hermit, gazing from a cell on distant loveliness; he believes that life unshared was ordained him that through pain of loneliness his song might be sweeter. Yet with Crashaw, he dreams of a supposed mistress, but without his calm of vision; with Spenser, beauty is a religion to him, yet he has nothing of Spenser's serenity. In his moods of dejection, like Donne he thinks of his grave and shakes to the wind that waves the grass upon it. He has not fought his way to the heights from

which he can look down with contempt on the kingdoms of this world. An American critic has remarked that the poet's distress "is aggravated at once by the impatience and uncertainty of his faith, impatient in its clamour for the heavenly rapture, uncertain whether this rapture is to be obtained by a repudiation of the flesh or 'by that embrace of the body and spirit, Seen and Unseen,' as he calls it."¹ Nowhere is this so poignantly expressed as in those stanzas in which he asks whether his great desires are "food but for nether fires," whether he must finally

" Through sacrificial tears,
And anchoretic years,
Tryst
With the sensualist?"

This conflict between things temporal and things eternal, between man and God, is most magnificently shown in his ode, *The Hound of Heaven*, the flower of modern catholic poetry.✓ The theme, the pursuit of the soul by God, is no new one. We find it in the *Psalms*; the very title is almost suggested by a passage in *Aurora Leigh* describing Truth:

" I, Aurora, still
Have felt it hound me through the wastes of life
As Jove did Io; and until that Hand
Shall overtake me wholly and on my head
Lay down its large unfluctuating peace,
The feverish gad-fly pricks me up and down."²

If the theme be old, its treatment is new, for no English poet has so combined a conception Miltonic in its sweep, with an expression as beautiful and as personal as Shelley's:

¹ P. E. More, *Shelburne Essays*, seventh series, N. Y., 1910, p. 160.

² Seventh Book.

"I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after."

We may say confidently that already Thompson's place among English poets is secure; whether it be so high a one as his friends have claimed may well be questioned. Milton has said that poetry should be simple, sensuous, and passionate. Sensuous and passionate these poems certainly are; they lack that highest gift, an inevitable simplicity.

John Davidson (1857-1909), after a brief career as school teacher and clerk, came to London in 1890 to win his fortune by his pen. It was a hard experience, the old story of worth by poverty depressed, and it is significant that three of his most pathetic lyrics are entitled *From Grub St.*² He chose to cast them in French forms and they are all the more touching because we have associated the rondel and villanelle with gayer moods. Though a man of infinite courage, over much that he wrote falls the shadow of gloom and of tragedy. He was an unsparing worker, he produced some twenty books—novels, plays, lyrics—yet his audience was always a limited one. Worn out by his tasks, believing himself to be struck with a hopeless malady, he threw himself into the sea.

Browning's line, "I was ever a fighter," might well have been Davidson's device. The son of a Scottish clergyman, he conceived it to be his mission to overthrow not merely the stricter Calvinism in which he was reared but all religions,

¹ *Selected Poems*, p. 51.

² *In a Music Hall and other Poems*, London, 1891, p. 25.

and to set up in their stead a new gospel, a new materialism, though that word does not adequately describe it. This became with him not simply a determined purpose but an obsession; again and again he rings the changes on the havoc wrought by Christianity. This revolt against accepted belief appears in song and eclogue; it is set forth with the greatest feeling in his tragic *Ballad in Blank Verse of the Making of a Poet*, in which much of his own experience seems interwoven.¹ It led him far astray. He was a lyric poet of unusual gifts. He felt the music, the witchery of words; he loved the colors and sounds of nature; he was inspired by the greatness of the present age; he was exultingly confident of man's progress and final triumph. Such a temperament would find its best expression in song but his doctrine of materialism made him in the end a preacher, a controversialist, a bitter arraigner of society. In his last volume, the lyric note had almost ceased.

Davidson's poetry possessed the rare combination of strength and delicacy. It had a force and vitality which in its best expression is positively thrilling. We feel this not only in his oft-expressed rebellion against the modern ordering of life, but even in his pictures of nature:

"The adventurous sun took Heaven by storm;
Clouds scattered largesses of rain;
The sounding cities, rich and warm,
Smouldered and glittered in the plain."²

There is no better hunting song in the language than his ballad of *A Runnable Stag*.³ We could imagine that the stanzas came to him while galloping against the wind; in their sense of motion at least they surpass Browning's *How they brought the good news from Ghent to Aix*. The rush

¹ *Ballads and Songs*, London, 1895, p. 7.

² P. 53. *A Ballad of a Nun*.

³ *Holiday and other Poems*, London, 1906, p. 14.

and impetus of Davidson's verse is one of its rarest qualities, yet he knew as few have known the woods, the flowers, and the birds, and he sings of them in a spirit far removed from the turmoil of his ballads.

As Wordsworth and his followers discovered nature, within the last two decades a group of poets has discovered the city, "London the unknown," richer than the ocean floor and its treasure house, insolent and beautiful, a place of infinite horror and despair, of infinite courage and felicity. Davidson was one of this band, for with Henley, who certainly influenced him, he finds beauty in the thronged streets, in the noise of the traffic, in the city half hidden in the mist and fog, or bathed in the light of sunrise or sunset. Tennyson's great lyric has almost a counterpart in his song:

" ' Oh sweetheart, see! how shadowy,
Of some occult magician's rearing,
Or swung in space of heaven's grace
Dissolving, dimly reappearing,
Afloat upon ethereal tides
St. Paul's above the city rides! "

" A rumour broke through the thin smoke
Enwreathing abbey, tower, and palace,
The parks, the squares, the thoroughfares,
The million-peopled lanes and alleys,
An ever-muttering prisoned storm,
The heart of London beating warm."¹

In the last analysis Davidson is a realist rather than a romanticist and he gives us not merely visions of the city but etchings in which even its sordid aspects are not hidden. But above the unfolding panorama of London, its vast power stirs him; it is the living symbol of England's greatness to this poet, as ardent a patriot and imperialist as Kipling himself.

¹ *Ballads and Songs*, p. 86, London.

The volume of Davidson's which has the greatest promise of long life is his *Fleet Street Eclogues*, an unassuming little book which, in English at least, has no rival. Here, in the heart of London, at all seasons of the year, a few men meet to sing of themes ranging from England's greatness to the tragedy of heredity, for science deeply influenced this poet. Whatever the subject may be, very shortly one and all are chanting the praises of the country life they have just left and to which they long to return. Many pages of these eclogues are merely a series of nature songs, for it is characteristic that the beauty of earth moves Davidson so profoundly that he can not describe it or moralize upon it—he must sing it. Because of his creed, nature, matter glorified, stirred him to his depths. He endeavored to put his most enduring thoughts in his so-called *Testaments*. In the *Testament of a Man Forbid*, the poet proclaims the worthlessness of art, philosophy, and religion:

“The rainbow reaches Asgard now no more;
Olympus stands untenanted; the dead
Have their serene abode in earth itself,
Our womb, our nurture, and our sepulchre.
Expel the sweet imaginings, profound
Humanities and golden legends, forms
Heroic, beauties, tripping shades, embalmed
Through hallowed ages in the fragrant hearts
And generous blood of men; the climbing thoughts
Whose roots ethereal grope among the stars,
Whose passion-flowers perfume eternity,
Weed out and tear, scatter and tread them down;
Dismantle and dilapidate high heaven.”¹

For this he is banished from his fellows. Despairing, he turns to the earth and finds a refuge in the hills that overlook the sea, in the pageant of spring, in all the changes

¹ *The Testament of a Man Forbid*, London, 1901, p. 11.

of the year. To no recent poet has the beauty of nature brought more delight or more solace.

It is Davidson's misfortune that at times the fires of his mind smouldered and did not melt the gold from the ore. Merely from the point of taste, there are many lapses in his work and there is need of rescuing the best from much that was published too hastily. Time, the safest critic, will eventually do this. Davidson will not be forgotten, for his verse has much of that force which he admired in the life of the city, much of that beauty which he discovered in the life of nature.

II

Of the living poets, we shall consider but seven, and first of all, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (b. 1840). He is interesting because so much of his work is in the sonnet form, which he employs for narrative in *Esther*, and for a study of emotions in the *Love Sonnets of Proteus*. More than any other metre, it has brought out his best qualities. His *Love Lyrics*, written in many different measures, lack charm, though one song at least from this series has attracted composers. "Oh for a day of Spring" is the exultant expression of a familiar theme:

" Oh for a day of youth,
A day of strength and passion,
Of words that told the truth
And deeds the truth would fashion!
I would not leave untasted
One glory while it lasted."¹

As a sonneteer, Blunt is not distinguished for his technique. He believed that the Petrarchian rhyme scheme is not adapted to our language and he accordingly invented a new one; it has not found favor. The musical element in his verse is

¹ *Esther, Love Lyrics, and Natalia's Resurrection*, London, 1892, p. 62.

the slightest one. We have noticed, however, that an intense moment, a sudden vision of the imagination will often find an expression that is ordinarily beyond the poet's reach and there are times when Blunt's sonnets attain a style that is admirable. To give but a single instance, the two descriptive sonnets entitled *The Sublime* are well worthy of their name.¹

In the preface to *A New Pilgrimage* the poet regrets that unlike the Italians of the fourteenth century, we do not make the sonnet "the vehicle of our daily thoughts about daily affairs as well as that of our profoundest utterances in religion, love and politics." This he desires to do and he accordingly gives us not a series of pictures but of experiences. With a simplicity, a frankness, and a force, at times disconcerting—for rightly or wrongly the Anglo-Saxon is reserved where the Latin poets find nothing to conceal—he tells in *Esther* the story of another des Grieux or in *Proteus* shows another Manon. The ringing note in these poems is their pitiless sincerity. Henley considered that they disclosed more plainly than any other writing of the age a poet's personality and experience.² The simple and even homely vocabulary; the strict avoidance of the gilded phrase or skillful epithet; the striking absence of studied contrasts give to these verses the very impress of reality.

The *Love Sonnets of Proteus* are Blunt's best claim to remembrance. This book, first issued anonymously, disclosed in the plainest speech a life not governed by

"a smooth and stedfast mind,
Gentle thoughts and calm desires."

On the contrary, he had "gambled with his soul"; he had pawned his heritage; he had tasted the fruit from the tree

¹ *The Love Sonnets of Proteus*, fourth edition, London, 1898, pp. 113-114.

² *The Poetry of Wilfrid Blunt, selected and arranged by W. E. Henley and George Wyndham*, London, 1898, p. v.

of knowledge of good and of evil and found it but poison.
He is sick and travel-worn; he calls himself

“ the latest fool of Time,
Sad child of doubt and passionate desires,”

yet there is no trace of Dowson's pale cast of thought in these verses. With the intensity of Hamlet, he cries out upon the

“Lame, impotent conclusion to youth's dreams
Vast as all heaven!”

He is a fatalist and considers man a foolish worm that can not change its lot:

“Behold, the flower-pot
Of fate is emptied out, and one by one
The fisher takes you, and his hooks are blind.”

The inevitable summing up of life is his exclamation “There is no comfort underneath the sun.” This, then, is the old *Weltschmerz* expressed in modern phrase. Such writing has the bitter flavor of Meredith's *Modern Love*; indeed, many of Blunt's lines could appear undetected in the earlier sequence. His tragic conclusion

“We planted love, and lo it bred a brood
Of lusts and vanities and senseless joys,”

might be the text for both writers.

These sonnets are not all despairing; they have at least their happy moments. *St. Valentine's Day*, describing a ride on the downs; *A Day in Sussex*, praising nature the consoler; *Gibraltar*, thrilling with patriotism, show that the poet can forget what he has called *The Mockery of Life*, yet these moods come rarely.¹

In a sonnet entitled *On Reading the Memoirs of M. D'Artagnan*, Blunt longs to be a “ruffler in the camps of

¹*Proteus*, Nos. L., LXXVIII., CVI., LXIX.-LXXI.

Mazarin," and regrets that he was born in these degenerate times to a sad heritage

"Of fierce desires which cannot fate control,
Of idle hopes life never can assuage."¹

He would turn his steps backwards to escape the present. Austin Dobson (b. 1840) dwells in "the past Georgian day" and writes of an old Sedan chair or of Beau Brocade, not because he is embittered and wishes to forget modern life, but because he has made the eighteenth century his own and moves in it as naturally as one to its manner born. In his prose, in biography and essay, he has shown us the life and thought of that period; in his verse, he discovers for us the poetry of an age we have considered eminently prosaic.

This implies that Dobson's verse is written in a library rather than in the open air. He is a reminiscent writer and appeals most strongly to one who knows Horace and Prior, to those who appreciate the art of French metres. As Lang has put it:

"A little of Horace, a little of Prior,
A sketch of a Milkmaid, a lay of the Squire—
These, these are 'on draught' 'At the Sign of the Lyre!'

"A *lai*, a *pantoum*, a *ballade*, a *rondeau*,
A pastel by Greuze, and a sketch by Moreau,
And the chimes of the rhymes that sing sweet as they go."²

There is nothing of modern realism in such work. If the pathos of life is there, its sordidness, its tragedies are carefully hidden. He would rather captivate our fancy and call up delightful reveries than stir our feelings; consequently his appeal to the past has little that the romantic novelist

¹ No. LXV.

² *A Review in Rhyme*, in *Grass of Parnassus*, London, 1888, p. 62.

offers us. No one is further from the pedant than Dobson; he has always worn his learning lightly, and yet only a student could have caught this atmosphere of old Paris or old London, precisely as only the most careful workman could have written his ballades and what are probably the best rondeaux in the language.

All that Dobson has written possesses charm. "Assume that we are friends," he tells the reader, and indeed he need not have said it, for we are friends at once without this invitation. He has Prior's gift of putting himself immediately *en rapport* with his audience. This intimacy is increased by his avoidance of the higher style; there are few long flights in his verse. He has understood perfectly his limitations as well as his gifts; he is happy in his own realm and consequently there is no unevenness in his work. More important, there is no dull level of mediocrity in it, for in every line that he writes, Dobson is an artist. This it is that gives to his poetry its attractiveness and its value. The finest living writer of *vers de société*, he lacks Præd's wit and Thackeray's humor, but he surpasses both of his predecessors in the finish of his work. He has taken to heart Gautier's lesson:

"Leave to the tiro's hand
The limp and shapeless style;
See that thy form demand
The labour of the file."¹

He has what Herrick called a "terse Muse." In all his word-pictures, not a syllable is wasted; in all his songs, there is no meaningless note.

We have compared Dobson with Prior and in one point especially these two poets resemble each other: the lyric is not their chief form. Dobson's feeling is not superficial yet

¹ *Ars Victoriae*, in *Old-World Idylls*, London, 1893, p. 206.

it is not deep enough to demand song; there are not many times when, to quote his own words,

" the pent sensation
Leaps to lyric exultation
Like a song-bird from a grave."¹

A little group of lyrics show what he could do when he wished a more musical form—*A Song to the Lute, The Ladies of St. James, The Milkmaid, A Garden Song, A song of the Four Seasons*, and we must not omit the song in "Good-Night, Babette!" for which he has provided such an exquisite setting.

Andrew Lang is the most versatile of modern English writers.² He has won well-deserved distinction as an essayist, poet, historian, translator of Homer, a writer of romances, a student of primitive religions and folk-lore. Indeed what has he not written, if we except the realistic novel to which he is a sworn foe? He turns from fishing to the Homeric question, from golf to Celtic mythology, and what is more astonishing, he has invariably something worth saying. He is the standing exception in our day to the rule that rapid writing makes poor reading.

For his lyric verse, he has studied under the best masters—the poets of the Greek anthology, Charles D'Orléans, Villon, Marot, Du Bellay, Ronsard. If for nothing else, he would be remembered for his translations. To give but three typical examples, it would be difficult to improve upon his rendering of Ronsard's *De l'élection de son Sepulchre*, Belleau's *Avril*, and Du Bellay's *Chanson du Vannneur*. His love for French verse is reflected in many a poem; it is shown most delightfully in his series of ballades, grave and gay, written with the most facile pen. If not one of them is a masterpiece, Lang himself has pointed out that "no man since

¹ *A Revolutionary Relic*, in *At the Sign of the Lyre*, London, 1894, p. 49.

² Since this was written, Andrew Lang died, July 20, 1912.

François Villon has been immortalized by a single ballade—*Mais où sont les neiges d'antan?*¹

This poet is a skilled musician who can play deftly for all moods. If the muse of Dobson wears an arch smile, the muse of Lang indulges in heart-easing mirth. He knows just how far to carry parody—what could be neater than his answer to Jules Lemaitre's *Britannia?*—and his gayety and wit have given him a place with our best writers of light verse.² He has, however, never allowed his wit to rule his poetry. To see his lyric style, one should read his *Scythe Song*, a bit of pure melody; *Desiderium*, a low-pitched dirge that strikes home; *Almæ Matres*, one of the sincerest poems university life has inspired; and *Homeric Unity*, his best sonnet, though he does not admit it.³ But the poet is at his best when he plays on the old theme of romance. He loves to linger in "Le Vieux Château de Souvenir," and proclaim that "King Romance has come again." Two poems in this mood will be long remembered: "My love dwelt in a Northern land" and the less known *Lost Love*.

"Who wins his Love shall lose her,
Who loses her shall gain,
For still the spirit woos her,
A soul without a stain;
And Memory still pursues her
With longings not in vain!

"Oh, happier he who gains not
The Love some seem to gain:
The joy that custom stains not
Shall still with him remain,
The loveliness that wanes not,
The Love that ne'er can wane.

¹ Introduction to reprint of *Ballades and Rhymes*, London, 1911.

² *Ban and Arrière Ban*, London, 1897, p. 45.

³ *Grass of Parnassus*, p. 55; *Ballades and Rhymes*, pp. 143, 139, 181.

“ In dreams she grows not older
 The lands of Dream among,
 Though all the world wax colder,
 Though all the songs be sung,
 In dreams doth he behold her
 Still fair and kind and young.”¹

The value of the lyrics of Robert Bridges (b. 1844) has not been adequately recognized. On this side of the Atlantic at least, he is known but by the few songs published in anthologies. His verse is certain to reach a wider audience and eventually win for him a place among the foremost lyrists of the whole line of singers. As he sings of reflection and not of action, his appeal will never be a popular one. His qualities are not of a kind to force a hearing and he has chosen to live quietly, almost in retirement. His longer pieces (his plays for example), despite many fine passages scattered here and there, have chiefly an academic interest, and it is possible that this real defect has obscured his songs. The second volume of his *Poetical Works* is worth all the rest, for it contains lyrics that Campion, Herrick, and Blake would have been proud to own.

We are at once attracted in these lyrics by the exquisite taste of the poet. He writes of the best in nature and life in the choicest words that language can offer. He is gifted with what seems an instinct for the right phrase, expressing himself with a simplicity that partially conceals his art:

“—And every perfect action hath the grace
 Of indolence or thoughtless hardihood—”

In this respect he rivals the best French stylists, yet his sincere, serene, and lofty spirit prevents him from looking upon his songs as mere bits of dull perfection. They are

¹ *Ballades and Rhymes*, p. 166; *Ban and Arrière Ban*, p. 24.

never *Emaux et Camées*; even in his objective songs of nature, we feel the man. He gives us both art and life.

The metrical charm of these lyrics exceeds their verbal felicity. There are but two qualifying statements to be made in this praise. Strangely enough his sonnets show little of his best work, though they remind us at times of Spenser.

“ All earthly beauty hath one cause and proof,
To lead the pilgrim soul to beauty above:
Yet lieth the greater bliss so far aloof,
That few there be are wean'd from earthly love.
Joy's ladder it is, reaching from home to home,
The best of all the work that all was good;
Whereof 'twas writ the angels aye upclomb,
Down sped, and at the top the Lord God stood.”¹

This lacks the rare quality we perceive at once in the songs. Again, the larger, broader style is not his and with all his kinship with the Elizabethans, he never approaches their “mighty line.” He is our best interpreter of the metre of *Paradise Lost*, yet he is not of Milton's school. To take the positive side of the case, we have spoken of Campion. Bridges far surpasses him in the resources of his technique and is not already a classic because he is unfortunate enough to be one of our contemporaries. Much like the author of “Now winter nights enlarge” are many stanzas in Bridges's second ode to spring; yet when he catches the cadences of the Elizabethans, one never thinks of imitation. In such a bit of melody as “I heard a linnet courting” he has all their lightness, but with our modern feeling. “Crown Winter with green” is but a trifle, yet it seems to have strayed from Herrick's *Hesperides*. To complete our comparison, how like Blake at his best are such poems as “Angel spirits of

¹ *The Poetical Works of Robert Bridges*, London, 1898, vol. I., p. 253.

sleep," "Love on my heart from heaven fell," "The idle life I lead," or

" My delight and thy delight
Walking, like two angels white,
In the gardens of the night."¹

It would be poor praise to say that Bridges recalled the work of past singers. He has a quality all his own, in the feeling that informs his style. He is a beauty worshipper and his creed is simply expressed:

" I love all beauteous things,
I seek and adore them;
God hath no better praise,
And man in his hasty days
Is honoured for them.

" I too will something make
And joy in the making;
Altho' to-morrow it seem
Like the empty words of a dream
Remembered on waking."

In the old metre so roughly handled by Queen Elizabeth he sings:

" My eyes for beauty pine,
My soul for Goddës grace:
No other care nor hope is mine;
To heaven I turn my face."²

He finds the highest beauty in nature. He turns to the fields and woods, not as did Davidson, to forget the city and modern life and to discover a new philosophy, but in the

¹ Vol. II., London, 1899, pp. 20, 160, 145, 137, 144, 241.

² Pp. 123, 134.

placid mood of Walton. Even when this poet's spirit is most delighted, there is a quietness and calm in his verse. He seeks no inspiration from the past, nothing from France or Italy, but finds England, with its clear and gentle streams, its cliff-tops, its downs, its birds and flowers, a sufficient theme for his best work. He does not shut his eyes to the tragedy of life. If the *Elegy on a Lady, whom grief for the death of her Betrothed killed* seems too consciously Elizabethan, certainly the dirge

" I never shall love the snow again
Since Maurice died,"

and the most pathetic *On a Dead Child* are almost too poignant.¹ In general, however, the endeavor of this poet is to give us the beauty of each season, of every glimpse of land, or sea, or sky.

This beauty has no fatal dowry; it brings the most exalted happiness:

" But since I have found the beauty of joy
I have done with proud dismay:
For howsoe'er man hug his care,
The best of his art is gay."²

He invites us to leave our joyless ways. We are offered more than we can enjoy; the days are all too short for the "rare delight of mortal stuff." This intense pleasure in life and in his own art is expressed always with serenity, with nothing of "the wild joy of living." Here are no greater happenings than can come to every one; there is no adventure, no conflict. We must simply open our eyes and we may see what he sees:

¹ Pp. 34, 187, 91.

² P. 157.

“Then comes the happy moment: not a stir
 In any tree, no portent in the sky:
 The morn doth neither hasten nor defer,
 The morrow hath no name to call it by,
 But life and joy are one,—we know not why,—
 As though our very blood long breathless lain
 Had tasted of the breath of God again.”¹

He knows that there is an end to beauty, but there is nothing of Shelley's lament in “I have loved flowers that fade,” a lyric of Bridges that should be familiar to every lover of English verse. He realizes that to attain to the highest beauty and truth, one must “look not back nor tire.” There is no pallid æstheticism here, for he does not forget that though “Beauty and love are nigh” life has its tempest, flood and fire. He sums up his belief not in an ode, but in the simple lines:

“Press onward, for thine eye
 Shall see thy heart's desire.”²

We forget the serene happiness of Bridges when we turn to the poems of William Watson (b. 1858). Compared with his older contemporary, he has a broader if not a deeper mind; he has a wider outlook upon life; he is more a child of the past. This is to say that Watson has so communed with his great predecessors that he has caught a portion of their spirit; we may say that he has inherited it, for he is no imitator. As he himself proudly declares, he is thoroughly English; he deprecates the deference paid to the writers of the continent and takes for his masters Milton and Wordsworth, and we might add, Arnold and Tennyson.³ His very finest writing is found in his interpretation and praise of

¹ P. 110.

² P. 119.

³ To Edward Dowden, *The Poems of William Watson*, London, 1905, vol. I., p. 149.

the dead poets. Among his best epigrams are the ones on Marlowe, Shelley, Keats; his elegy on Tennyson, a remarkable piece of occasional verse, was the most adequate tribute the death of the laureate called forth; while *Wordsworth's Grave* is inspired criticism, surpassed by no English poem of its kind. It is interesting to contrast its vivid pictures of the Queen Anne age, of Gray and Collins, of Burns and Wordsworth, with the maxims of Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, for it shows at once how much more personal, we may even say "lyrical," has become the work of the modern critic.

Watson has stated that he owes most to Milton, "The starriest voice that e'er on English ears hath rung," and without even faintly suggesting a comparison, one may point out his resemblances to him. His best sonnets are not love poems, but intimate expressions of friendship or declarations of his attitude on the political questions of the day. Like Milton, he is an apostle of liberty, and the intense anger of "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints," is felt in Watson's sonnets called forth by the Turkish atrocities in Armenia. A good illustration of his Miltonic style is found in *Vita Nuova*, a poem written after his recovery from an illness that had clouded his mind. These lines have something of the dignity and restraint of Milton's references to his blindness:

"I too have come through wintry terrors,—yea,
Through tempest and through cataclysm of soul
Have come, and am delivered. Me the Spring,
Me also, dimly with new life hath touched,
And with regenerate hope, the salt of life;
And I would dedicate these thankful tears
To whatsoever Power beneficent,
Veiled though his countenance, undivulged his thought,
Hath led me from the haunted darkness forth
Into the gracious air and vernal morn."¹

¹ Vol. I., p. 105.

The more we read modern poetry, the more plainly we perceive the abiding influence of Wordsworth. Watson glories in it. He is no poet of the city which he would fain forget, but of the tarn, of the sea which he has hymned in elegiacs unsurpassed in English. He wishes that we could live

"more near allied
To cloud and mountain, wind and tide,
Cast this unmeaning coil aside,
And go forth free,"

for 'then we could

"hail the mystic bird that brings
News from the inner courts of things,
The eternal courier-dove whose wings
Are never furled;
And hear the bubbling of the springs
That feed the world."¹

Despite such stanzas, despite the rare enthusiasm and power of his *Ode in May*, Watson's lines on Arnold are true of his own work:

"The deep, authentic mountain-thrill
Ne'er shook his page!"

He has nothing of Wordsworth's confidence in the restoring, the teaching inspiration of nature, but confesses that beneath the dome of the sky or by the ocean he has "never wholly been at ease." There is nothing of Wordsworth's optimism in a poet who believes himself fated "among time's fallen leaves to stray," and that inevitably "A want of joy doth in his strains abide." He can not hold the faith of the fathers and writes of *The Unknown God*. The church is outwardly splendid, but inwardly cold and dead as the moon.

¹ Vol. I., p. 146.

"I wandered far in the wold,
And after the heat and glare
I came at eve to a churchyard old:
The yew-trees seemed at prayer.

"And around me was dust in dust,
And the fleeting light, and Repose—
And the infinite pathos of human trust
In a God whom no man knows."¹

With Arnold, he feels that men do not know for what they are striving. No account of Watson must omit his epigrams—they rank with the best—and a single one of them—*The Cathedral Spire*—is enough to show this mood.

"It soars like hearts of hapless men who dare
To sue for gifts the gods refuse to allot;
Who climb for ever toward they know not where,
Baffled for ever by they know not what."²

There is nothing of Henley's force or love of action, but something of Clough in this poet's view of life. Our ideals too quickly vanish and leave us resigned to our ignoble days; *The Glimpse* but leaves a man

"to carry in his soul
The torment of the difference till he die."

As these quotations show, there is back of all that Watson writes, a profound moral sense that gives to his work dignity and nobility of tone. He has never courted popularity; he is perhaps a little too disdainful of modern life and dwells too much "In the cold starlight where thou canst not climb." Nothing that he writes is careless or trivial in diction; in

¹ *New Poems*, London, 1909, p. 112.

² *Poems*, vol. II., p. 109.

style, as in life, he advocates "The things that are more excellent." Much of modern poetry is to him an orgy on Parnassus, and he turns from it to Tennyson:

" You phrase-tormenting fantastic chorus,
 With strangest words at your beck and call;
 Who tumble your thoughts in a heap before us;—
 Here was a bard shall outlast you all."¹

With his liking for the graver harmonies, and with his temperament, his best lyrics are elegies. There is a certain formality in the studied contrasts of "Thy voice from inmost dreamland calls," "That beauty such as thine," "When birds were songless on the boughs," that overcomes the song impulse. On the other hand, writing in the elegiac strain, such a descriptive poem as *The Frontier*—surely the equal of *The Autumnal* by Donne, which Walton so admired—becomes almost a lyric.²

There is something of Hamlet (though nothing of his bitterness) in this poet. He needs a compelling force, a high theme that shall engage all his gifts. He himself expresses this idea in his sonnet *Christmas Day*:

" Fated among time's fallen leaves to stray,
 We breathe an air that savours of the tomb,
 Heavy with dissolution and decay;
 Waiting till some new world-emotion rise,
 And with the shattering might of the simoom
 Sweep clean this dying Past that never dies."³

In nearly every respect, Rudyard Kipling (1865) offers the most striking contrast to Watson. He cares little for finish; he writes not of books or of men of the past, but of

¹ *New Poems*, p. 103.

² *Poems*, vol. I., pp. 64, 79, 80; vol. II., p. 22.

³ Vol. II., p. 4.

the intense life of the present; he prizes work above thought; he is a confirmed optimist. No poet since the great Victorians has enjoyed the popularity that has come to him; at its height, it must have resembled the eager reception given Byron's works. At the present moment, his fame seems undergoing an eclipse; certainly his recently published verse has proved disappointing, and critics seem convinced that he will be remembered by his prose. This implies that the attractiveness of much of the poetry has vanished. The over-brilliant colors have faded; the over-emphasis has ceased to be effective—"The tumult and the shouting dies." We tire of the Proverbial Philosophy of Imperialism and the trick of the *Barrack-Room Ballads*, once learned, no longer catches our fancy. There must be a complete readjustment of our estimates of him.

Of all modern poets, Kipling resembles most closely the old ballad makers. Their mantle has fallen on his shoulders; their swiftness and force are his, and he has shown in *The Last Rhyme of True Thomas* his right to this poetic succession.¹ But the ballads can be superb in their simplicity and vigor, because they do not preach; when Kipling exhorts, he can descend to doggerel. Love, war and death are the themes which most surely inspired these old makers; England and the ocean are the best sources of inspiration for this poet. Our English cousins are singularly fortunate in their literature of patriotism. Since London was Spenser's "kindly nurse," many a poet has sung of every aspect of that city. Each English county, it seems, has its writer to praise it, and there is a song for each mountain, lake and beach. If we except a few poems by Whitman, no American city has its singer, and our prairies, rivers, and forests rarely have found verse makers. England, then, haunts Kipling's imagination:

¹ *The Seven Seas*, p. 115.

"She is not any common Earth,
 Water or wood or air,
 But Merlin's Isle of Gramarye,
 Where you and I will fare."¹

He sees her sending her soldiers and sailors, her explorers
 and her colonists to all corners of the earth:

"Her hearth is wide to every wind
 That makes the white ash spin;
 And tide and tide and 'tween the tides
 Her sons go out and in;

"And some return by failing light,
 And some in waking dream,
 And she hears the heels of the dripping ghosts
 That ride the rough roof-beam."

We hardly associate delicacy and grace with his work, but
 his style gains it when he writes of English flowers:

"Buy my English posies!
 Kent and Surrey may—
 Violets of the Undercliff
 Wet with Channel spray;
 Cowslips from a Devon combe—
 Midland furze afire—
 Buy my English posies
 And I'll sell your heart's desire!"²

The natural culmination of this spirit is his *Recessional*, the
 high-water mark of his verse.

To Kipling, the sea is the great adventure ground of the
 world, and he knows its power and its cruelty. What other
 poet could have written *The Last Chantey*, *The Bell Buoy*,
White Horses, *The Sea and the Hills*, to name but a few of

¹ *Puck's Song* in *Puck of Pook's Hill*.

² *The Sea-Wife* and *The Flowers* in *The Seven Seas*, pp. 100, 111.

the best? He sings of the man-of-war, the ocean liner, the sealer, the fisherman's smack, caught up in the sweep of the waves, and we feel the very deck shake beneath our feet and the spray dash in our face. If we could demand any one thing of Kipling, it would be to abandon his sermons and history in rhyme and to give us a collection of sea lyrics. It would contain his finest writing and it would be unequalled.

Alfred Noyes (b. 1880) has not yet found himself and for this reason it is hard to form a definite opinion of his work. It arouses the keenest expectations and then disappoints us. His style, at its best, is fluent and musical; he has a sane and healthy attitude towards life; romance and nature make the great appeal to him. This is good but there must be something more—and the personality we seek in the verse is not there. He has written so much that he should write less; he has written so well that he should write better. When we read him, we think now of this, now of that poet, which implies that his verse lacks a character of its own. It has little of the economy of thought and expression that mark the best writing; it has none of those surprises, none of those phrases that startle by their unexpected beauty or strength. This does not mean that his work offers little of interest; it is rather an expression of regret that he has not learned what Arnold has called the "austerity of poetry." It is certainly a pleasure to hear him sing of the "cool of the evening," of "Sherwood in the twilight," or of "The World's May-Queen," "When Spring comes back to England." His lyrics show his finest writing.

If, in closing our chapter, we attempt to generalize on these latter-day poets, we shall find it a difficult matter, for each is a law unto himself. They have enlarged the resources of lyric expression, offering us such widely differing measures as the most graceful of French verse forms and the vigorous unrhymed songs of Henley. They have employed a style as realistic as the modern novel can show, and they have

written with the grace of Herrick. They have searched with the keenest vision for the shameful sights of city life and sung of them with burning anger; they have shut their eyes to the present and dreamed of the past. They have discovered a beauty in sights and sounds that earlier poets neither saw nor heard; they have been content to rediscover nature and to sing the old themes. They mourn their loss of faith or are combatively pagan; they have the visions of the mystic and the faith of a child. On the whole, they have brought the lyric closer to our life. They are more subtle, but they have not written with the force or the imagination of the older generation, for they are lesser personalities. They are too prone to dwell upon the moods of the moment, and we are seldom caught up by the sweep of their thought, the surge of their emotion. They have more than talent but they have less than genius.

We have now come to the end of our long journey and we pause for a moment to look back over the winding road. We still retain the impression formed on the way that the great age of the lyric, save for songs in the drama, is not so far distant as the time of Elizabeth. The question that comes to us now is not what the lyric has been but what it shall be. Is the long succession broken? Zola had little of the poet in him and it was, therefore, natural that he should be the one to declare most positively that verse had given its message and exhausted its resources. He believed that it would die and that henceforth the realistic novel would depict and interpret life for us.

If our study has taught us anything, it has shown us that the very periods when song seemed dead were but the quiet of the early morning before the day begins. The limited accomplishment of Wyatt and Surrey was succeeded by the Elizabethan lyric; Shenstone and the Wartons are followed by the romantic school. If to-day there is no great English poet, it by no means follows, as we have shown, that our

verse is unworthy or that it points to the end. The great spiritual gift of the English race is its poetry. Other nations have painted finer pictures, written finer music, carved finer statues. No people has produced such a band of inspired singers. England can not forget what is in her very blood. We may wait with confidence for her new lyric poet, for he will surely come; if we may not, as least our children shall hear him.

FINIS

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